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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[“DON’T YOU CARE FOR ME A LITTLE BIT?” SAID TAVY LESBOROUGH.]

HELEN’S DILEMMA.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AND what has Helen Brown been doing all this time? How has she been amusing herself whilst her quondam lover has been exploring Brazilian forests, Mexican mines, and breaking brittle hearts?

August and September were passed in the most orthodox fashion at a very gay French watering-place in company with Mr. and Mrs. Towers—stolid-minded, practical, unimaginative colonials, whose eyes were opened in stony amazement at many of the curious sights which came under their notice for the first time at Trouville.

But after a while they became quite accustomed to the jauntily-attired ladies and gentlemen who disported themselves together in the sea. In very *royante* costumes, and the absence of all grace of any kind!

They enjoyed themselves extremely in their own particular way; enjoyed the brilliant weather, the gay, ever-varying crowd, the

excellent table d’hôte, and a general sense of delicious, luxurious idleness—idleness that was in itself even praiseworthy, for were they not all recuperating their shattered energies, and doing vast things for their constitutions in drinking in quantities of the very best ozone, whilst they sat in oddly-shaped, hooded chairs on the hard yellow sands, and saw London and Paris and Vienna bathing, and flirting, and strolling before their much-occupied eyes?

Lord Lesborough has made his way to Trouville also, and found out Miss Helen Brown, where she sits on the sands under the shelter of a scarlet umbrella, with a Tauchnitz novel, face downwards, in her lap, gazing out on the bright blue glassy sea, on the white-sailed boats, and on the distant horizon with far-away, dreamy eyes?

Of whom is she thinking? Certainly not of the young man who is rapidly approaching her with a gait and an expression that assures all lookers-on that he is confident of being warmly welcomed by the “Belle Anglaise,” who is at present secluded from the public eye beneath her capacious parapluie.

The public eye resents the enormous dimensions of that brightly-tinted shelter, for the public eye admires “la jeune demoiselle Anglaise” with sincere appreciation.

“How d’ye do, Miss Brown?” says a voice that Helen recognizes, not with any emotion of either annoyance or pleasure. “Mrs. Towers told me I should find you down here, sunning yourself near the sea.”

“Oh, Lord Lesborough!” holding out a very prettily-gloved hand, “how do you do? Where did you drop from?”

“From Havre,” he replied, seating himself carefully on the sand beside her. “The Smiths-White brought me over in their yacht from Southampton, the *Camilla*. They have come for the regatta, and are staying at Frascati, so I just ran over here in the steamer—only twenty minutes, you know. And how do you like Trouville?”

“Oh, I like it; it is very cheerful and sunny, and there is always something going on,” with a little yawn, decently concealed by the Tauchnitz.

“The place seems pretty much the same to you as another, Miss Brown,” exclaimed the

blaze young nobleman in an aggrieved voice, digging little holes angrily in the sand with the end of his immaculate cane. "You don't care about London, nor the country, nor the sea-side," he proceeded, in a tone of irritated interrogation, but no answer was vouchsafed to his remark.

Miss Brown's beautifully-cut lips were closed, and her eyes were again dreamily fixed on the horizon. —

"I suppose if your company is to your liking it makes all the difference?" he continued, poking deeper and still deeper into the sand.

"Yes, I suppose so," replied Helen, abstractedly. "Oh, I beg your pardon! I was not thinking of what I was saying!"

"No, you were not even listening," responded Tavy, indignantly.

There were not many girls who would see a lord literally and figuratively at their feet with such stoical, such rude indifference, such unnatural insouciance.

"I wish I could persuade you to care for my society," he continued, in a low, insinuating voice. "I wouldn't make half a bad husband!"

In this form and in this graceful language was the Lesborough croon tendered for Helen's acceptance.

"No, perhaps not," replied Helen, shifting her umbrella little, and surveying her companion with a cool, dispassionate gaze.

"Suppose you try?" he suggested, raising himself on his elbow, and looking up into her face with unusual animation, and with all the battery of persuasion that his eyes can muster.

"Thank you very much; but I am not disposed to change my present state," replied the young lady, with a laugh, affecting to treat the whole matter as a joke.

"I assure you that I am awfully fond of you, Helen!" said her suitor, raising himself to a sitting posture, and endeavouring (under the friendly shelter of the red umbrella) to possess himself of one of her pretty little hands. "Don't you care for me one little bit?"

"No, not one little bit in the way you mean," replied Helen, pushing back her chair so suddenly and so unexpectedly that her companion very nearly fell prostrate on the sand, and measured his length at her feet.

"Then, there's some other fellow," he urged, standing erect, and dusting the sand from the knees of his trousers. "Who is he?"

"That is a question you have no right to ask; but I assure you that there is no one else!"

"Oh, Helen! Was it the reflection of the umbrella or was it a sudden suffusion of natural colour that made her face assume for an instant a pretty rosy tint?

No; there certainly was no one else now, she told herself emphatically; and, as far as her feelings were any guide, there would never be any one again. No, never!

Thus Lord Lesborough pleaded his suit in vain that day upon the sands of Trouville. Vainly he urged his mother's anxiety, her aunt's warm support, Mrs. Towers's best wishes! The fair lady at his side carried her head very erect under her red umbrella, and was deaf to the traditional adder.

But Tavistock was persistent. He could not, and would not, take no. The more unwilling Miss Brown was to listen the more eager he was to be heard.

"When Mr. and Mrs. Towers return to Tasmania you will be practically alone!" he observed. "You will have no home of your own, and I shall come again, and offer you mine. After Christmas I shall certainly come again!"

To this Helen made no reply. Silence is so easy at times, and according to all proverbs, ancient and modern, silence is so wise! But did she fail to remember one adage at this crucial moment? Apparently she had forgotten that "silence gives consent."

And with this kind of consent Lord Les-

borough was perfectly satisfied. He paid his respects to Mr. and Mrs. Towers, he visited the Etablissement, he partook of a most excellent dinner, and returned to Havre by the last boat, in the best—nay, the most buoyant—of spirits!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

TOWARDS the end of December the Towers were again in London. They had been nearly a year in England, and were seriously discussing their return to Tasmania in the spring.

At times Helen was half inclined to accompany them. What had she to detain her in England? "Many friends, and not a few lovers," the popular voice would have promptly replied.

Yes; but were these not fair-weather friends? she asked herself; and was not a grain of that friendship born on the banks of the Derwent better than a whole peck of this English substitutes? Why not return to the scenes of her childhood? Why not forget her year of misery—her other year of false, hollow, dissatisfied gaiety, and live again a life of sweet, uneventful, innocent simplicity?

Katie might accompany her. Katie was now better than she had been for years, and, excepting by her father, Katie was not appreciated at home.

This idea, this notion of returning to the Colonies, was decided and scouted by all who heard the subject mentioned. Even Mr. and Mrs. Towers set their faces against it. Helen was to remain in England—it was always her father's intention.

But where was she to stay? She did not like to put the question to her little sister point blank, but it frequently forced itself to her own notice. Was she, a girl of twenty, to set up housekeeping alone? No; that would never do. Was she to return, and live with her aunt, Mrs. Dowager? That alternative would be still worse.

What they really hoped and expected was this—that as they had reached the world, they would step into a more refined sphere, and give them the gratifying news to carry to their friends that their late protégé and ward had become a peeress of England and Lady Lesborough!

The news of Sir Rupert's "scrape" had begun to be talked about, whispered about, and written about. It came to Helen's ears in various ways. It had been smiled about, and hinted at a little tea; and a very piquantly-worded, curiously-compelling paragraph had found a corner in one of the society papers.

Then, besides all this, had she not a nice long letter from her cousin Blanche?

"MY DEAREST HELEN."

"What a wretch you are! You have not written to me for ages—you really are a most abominable correspondent! I want you to call in at Madame Jabol's, like a good soul, and see if she has cleaned and mended my lace, and mother's flounce, the point d'Alençon. Do write, like a dear, and tell me about the fashions; for, although I was in town a month ago, the cut of winter paletots was very undecided; and I am writing to Madame Panier about a new coat. Should it be long and tight fitting? Do the best people wear stamped velvet or plain, or ribbed silk, or what? And, of course, I shall have far—that is your winter rig out. When are you coming down to us? Katie is panting to see you! She is much better, and able to get about wonderfully well. That imp Loo-Loo is going to school, thank the kind fates! She is off to Brussels on the 5th January. Papa is to take her, but I would not mind betting even money that she bolts en route. She has spent her time in floods of tears ever since the matter was settled. Serves her right—horrid young monkey—for anything to equal her temper and her tongue, and the way she behaved to her late governess, I could not describe to you! You were very silly about Tavy Lesborough. I heard he went over to

Trouville—all the way to see you—and you gave him the cold shoulder! My dear girl, if you saw what a jolly old place Lesborough Park is, and its capabilities with your taste—and if you saw the family diamonds (strange to say not yet pawned!) you would never. And really Tavy is not half a bad young man, as men go—devoted to you—inclined to be domestic; and you could turn him round your pretty little finger, I know! Talking of bad young men, have you heard of Rupert's escapade? Still water runs deep! We had a letter from Captain Torrens, making as light of the whole affair as possible, evidently awfully anxious to hush it up; but I am afraid that is known far and wide, in spite of his friendly intentions. It seems that Rupert carried on tremendously with some pretty Spanish girl, and refused to make the amende honorable—in other words, to marry her—but wished to love and ride away. However, one of her brothers came to the front—furious, of course—and demanded satisfaction on behalf of his sister; and Rupert very reluctantly was obliged to fight a duel, and was badly wounded in the lungs. I believe he has paid up a heap of money to the family, and they have decided to hush the matter up; but it is a very bad business altogether, much worse than what I have told you! I don't suppose Rupert will show his face in England for some time. I hear that Captain Torrens is coming home alone. My tea is cooling this ten minutes, so good-bye. Mother and Katie and the red-eyed Loo-Loo send their love, in which I join—Ever your affectionate cousin,

"BLANCHE DESPARD."

"P. S.—You might think twice of Tavy!" On receipt of this amiable effusion, Helen did not cast one single mental glance towards Lord Lesborough, his park, or his diamonds, but she thought a great deal on the subject of the other young man mentioned in the letter—of that bad young baronet, Sir Rupert Lynn. She could hardly credit the tale, and she distrusted Blanche's confidences; but in this case, were they not corroborated by the unimpeachable purveyors of scandal? And even appearances were not to be trusted—if the fact was not quite so bad as it seemed, was there not an old proverb that said, "There is never smoke without fire!"

The sun must have been some smoke; and even the very faintest doubt would be amply sufficient to show that he had forgotten her. Yes, if he still cared for her, he was the last man in the world to get up meaningless flirtations with dark-eyed, coquettish, fan-wielding senrices!

After she had allowed the subject to rankle in her mind for nearly a week, she began to take Blanche's advice, and to think twice of Tavy.

Tavy had some things to recommend him. He could give her a home. By marrying him she would please her friends. She would show Sir Rupert Lynn that she was not disposed to wait for his tardily-offered allegiance, nor to wear the willow! And Tavy was good-tempered, good-natured, easy to get on with, not jealous nor exacting; and certainly, it must be confessed, not over-burdened with brains. Still, a very clever husband might not be an unalloyed blessing!

Sir Rupert indisputably had plenty of brains, but he was jealous, distrustful, exacting, hot-tempered, and, worse than all, inconstant.

Yes, Blanche was very nearly right, but not quite. No, Helen, with all her newly-sharpened indignation, could not yet bring herself to call him bad.

The Towers and their beautiful ward are spending a week in a large, fashionable, and very favourite country house. They are bound on a series of these visits, that will carry them over the next four weeks.

Helen's big wicker-trunks, and the lovely frocks inside them, are indeed a sight to see; but Helen herself is asthetic, and cold, and insincere, and takes but little interest in the various amusements that are set going for the entertainment of the young people.

The only thing she cares about is riding;

and, greatly to Mrs. Towers's horror, she goes out hunting no less than twice a week, duly chaperoned by Mr. Towers himself; and the colonial young lady goes across country in a highly praiseworthy manner, and in a style that brings tears of envy from her cousin Blanche's light orbs as she remains perforce among the mob on the hard, high road.

Blanche would give her heart to be able to follow her cousin—the Tasmanian Diana. But, alas! Blanche has neither nerve nor experience, and Blanche must simply say to herself, "Be still, my heart! Be still!"

Captain Torrens has arrived at Baronscourt, arrived on a certain dark, misty evening, just in time to dress for dinner and present himself and his immense expanse of white shirt-front in the drawing-room just before that important meal. He gazed appreciatively round the bright luxurious apartment as he stood before one of the fire-places with his back to the logs, and witnessed one pretty girl after another comemalling into the room, in all the bewildering beauty of a lovely dinner-table, but not one of these hours who had gone before, was like the divinity who has entered last—divinity in the very palest blue damask satin, with large diamond fliers sparkling among her thick golden-brown hair, and he is to have the happiness of taking this too bewitching-looking young lady into dinner—this Miss Brown.

"Not much of a name," he says to himself, as he unfolds his napkin and arranges his glasses previous to discussing his soup. After the soup he refreshes himself with a glass of sherry and a good look at his fair neighbour. "Brown may be her name, but she has good blood in her veins—the outline of her perfect profile, her small ears, the shape of her hands, all fondly call out in their own way 'blue blood!'"

But she is silent—not disposed to talk—not inclined to notice him. He pulls his long tawny moustache reflectively, and asks himself if, as she is a beauty and an heiress, she is not standing on her privileges, and expecting him to entertain her. Well, he will see about it after the joint; and until then their conversation is monosyllabic.

Then they plunge into the topic of the pantomime, the late runs with the foxhounds, some recent grand weddings in high life; but Miss Brown avoids, as she would the pestilence, the name of Brazil, or any allusion to foreign countries.

However, a little old gentleman opposite, with a bald head, and a very sharp face, is by no means so reticent. Helen has seen him listening—all eagerness—and evidently most anxious to get in a word for nearly five minutes. At last he sees his chance, and leaning across the table, says to Captain Torrens—

"By the way, Torrens, what did you do with Lynn?"

"Oh! I left him at St. Thomas," returned that gentleman, placidly; "he was in no hurry to get home, and I was!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the little old gentleman, wrinkling up his nose in an unpleasant smile; "you had no attractions out there, and he had. That was a nice business about the Spanish girl. Lynn's a good-looking fellow, and, by all accounts, played the deuce among the señoritas," he concluded, with a hard, old laugh that seemed to come from the back of his head.

His heart was now merry with wine, and he was disposed to be both loquacious and indiscreet; but his efforts at drawing out Captain Torrens were nipped by that young man in the bud. He effected temporary deafness, and turned his entire attention to his fair companion. How pale she was—curiously pale! It was rather becoming to her statuesque-looking profile, this excessive pallor; but certainly he had imagined that she possessed some colour when he had been presented to her before dinner! They talked the usual dinner-table common-places, and more than once it occurred to him that Miss Brown had opened her mouth as if to speak; but that, by

some curious process, the words she wished to utter had died away upon her lips. It never occurred to him for a moment that she knew, or even took the smallest interest in, his late fellow-traveller, Sir Rupert Lynn; and that she sat by his side outwardly lovely placid-looking, perfectly composed, and well-bred young lady—and inwardly a living, devouring fire of aching anxiety to hear from his lips the true bare facts of what led to his friend's duel—how that friend was? and when he might be expected in England? Pride closed her mouth; still the society of Captain Torrens had an extraordinary fascination for the fair Helen. She hovered round and round the topic of his Brazilian experiences as a moth does round a candle; but, as yet, she had never rushed into the flame with any direct or self-accusing inquiries. She was very lovely, he thought—very clever and intelligent, and marvellously interested in his late experiences. She was well read, and quite up in the physical geography of South America; she had read the conquests of Peru and Mexico, and many recent books of travels; and was altogether a singularly well informed young lady! He never imagined, for a moment, that she had a special interest in that part of the globe, or that her studies were the effect of which his journey to the West had been the cause!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Two or three evenings later the Nimrods and Dianas of the party were seated in the old oak panelled Hall, drawn round a blazing log fire, and sipping fragrant hot tea; and discussing the late run, and exchanging experiences to the languidly interested amusement of various daintily tea-gowned figures, who were sunken in various luxurious low chairs, and thought that hunting (especially for women) was a kind of mild, mental disease. How much pleasanter to sit at home over a good fire and an interesting novel this bitter winter-day, than to go tearing across country, over horrid fences and ploughed land, on a hard pulling horse like Miss Kentish and Miss Brown—who had just joined the refined circle, with cool rosy faces, muddy habits, and an air of intensely aggravating self-satisfaction. They had both ridden very straight indeed, and earned the acclamations of their gentlemen friends, and the plaudits of their own esteem, and were now fully prepared for the gentle délassements of tea and conversation.

Helen sank into a comfortable low-cushioned seat, removed her hat, and accepted tea and hot cake from Captain Torrens' respectful hands; and that gentleman, having provided for himself, speedily found accommodation beside her, and commenced a series of criticisms and remarks about their capital run from Goddington's Gorse. Another gentleman, a young guardsman, tea-cup in hand, showed a very amiable (and perhaps not unnatural) desire to share in the delights of Helen's conversation, and drawing a chair gently into her neighbourhood, subsided therein. They talked of hunting, of hounds, of horses; and, finally, of hunting men, and young Mr. Spiller was loud in his encomiums on the riding of a certain Tommy Pratt.

"I saw him take the iron gate into the turnpike road without winking. I don't know when I saw such a beggar to ride! Lynn is another of the same pattern; but he has done no hunting this year. He has taken to be a regular globe trotter," contemptuously.

"Ah, well! I daresay he will be here for the tail end of the season, and show you the way still," said Captain Torrens, encouragingly.

"By Jove! Torrens," returned the other, somewhat irreverently, "that was a curious affair out in Brazil. I never heard the ins-and-outs of it—what was it all about? I can't fancy Lynn, of all people, playing the romantic serenading duelling dodge!"

"My dear fellow, if I have told the story once, I have twenty times. Only this very morning I was button-holed by that terrible bore, Eyre Hall, and interviewed by him with

as much pertinacity and insistence as if he had been an American reporter."

"Well, 'tis nearly all the same. He is the greatest gossip in town, and whatever you have told him will be in the smoking-room of every club in London before the week is out. 'Hear All,' as they call him, is better than any newspaper!" said Mr. Spiller, with an air of deep conviction. "I hope you remembered that when you gave him your confidence."

"I did, you may swear. It seems that the people over here have quite got hold of the wrong end of the stick, so it was just as well to tell the old boy, and let him start a fresh story."

"And what is the story?" said Mr. Spiller, rising to take Helen's cup—her hand was shaking, she was literally quivering with repressed excitement, and with an agonising thurst for details.

"Do tell us!" encouragingly, as he resumed his seat. "It will give our appetites a gentle fillip, won't it Miss Brown? The true and accurate account of how a very cool and collected fellow of our acquaintance went off to see the world, fell in love with a pretty Brazilian, and fought a duel on her account! Come now, Torrens, begin; make it as interesting as you can, and polish it up with a bit of local colouring."

"It has been too much polished up and coloured already," said the other, crossing his legs and speaking in a tone of smothered irritation. "It has been improved out of all recognition. The facts of the case are these—but, perhaps, turning to Helen, this is rather a bore to you?"

"Not at all," she answered, with nervous haste. "Go on!" very eagerly; "tell us all about the duel—so unusual—so—most interesting," she stammered.

"Well," proceeded Captain Torrens, joining the tips of his fingers together, leaning back in his chair and speaking oratorically.

"Lynn and I went out to Rio together, and a man out there connected with our mine put us up. He was very friendly and hospitable, and had two extremely pretty daughters."

"Ah!" ejaculated Mr. Spiller, with much significance.

"Well," pursued the other, equably; "we went off, explored, prospected, travelled, and came back to Rio at the end of four months, and were received with open arms by Senor Carvalho's household—"

"Ah!—dear me—you don't say so!" again interrupted Mr. Spiller, with ironical amusement; and Helen, with a sudden little restlessness of her elbow, displaced a book on a neighbouring table, which fell with a sullen, soft bang to the floor.

"These señoritas were very delightful—they made a great deal of us—they rode with us, danced with us, star gazed with us, and taught us how to flirt!"

"I should not think that you had much to learn in that line," laughed Mr. Spiller; "but Lynn—how did he get on? was he a promising pupil?"

"No—not specially so. No; he did not act up to his opportunities. He was a passive victim, and the unlucky young lady, instead of subduing him to her yoke, fell into the snare herself, and became most foolishly and flagrantly in love with the stony-hearted Englishman!"

"Après?" demanded Mr. Spiller, with an air of wrapt attention, and gently raised eyebrows.

"Après? Well, I believed she bothered the very life out of Lynn—and he was dying to cut the whole concern and come home, but my affairs delayed us. I believe one of the señoritas' adorers was furiously jealous—a little naturally, perhaps, seeing that she had no longer eyes, or ears, or tongue for any of her own compatriots—and he sought a quarrel. Lynn was ready—foolishly ready to oblige him—and they fought. He was a regular little sweep—a common, under-bred blackguard, not worth steel—but Lynn was the challenged; he would have his way, and they fought one early

morning by the banks of the Rio Grande. The Brazilian was a notorious duellist—a splendid swordsman—and, after meeting with a cool, steady resistance that nearly drove him mad, he ran Lynn right through the lungs, and went off laughing! The Carvalhos were in an awful state. They wanted to nurse the wounded man, of course, but we had had enough of Senorita Inez, and I carried him off to the steamer on the spot. Fine work we had among us to bring him round, too. He was in very bad way for days, and quite off his head at times; however, when we parted at St. Thomas he was fairly convalescent, and able to crawl out and sit in the sun. He means to come home by the States," he tells me.

"And you mean to say that he did not care about the girl?" inquired Mr. Spiller, with round-eyed amazement, and an expression of mildly subdued disbelief.

"No more than you do," returned the other, with warm asseveration; "no more"—turning to where Helen sat, with straining ears but veiled eyes—"no more," triumphantly, "than he cares for Miss Brown!"

A rich flood of crimson suffused Miss Brown's cheeks at this declaration—a flood that started from the little white collar round her throat, and concluded among the roots of her hair.

"And why was he so hard-hearted?" asked Mr. Spiller, judicially. "Come now, he must have had some reason!"

"Well, I think there was—you won't mention this?" mysteriously—"some girl at home, I believe!"

"Who? I did not see him paying special attention to any one last season; he is not much of a society man."

"I don't know who she is, or was; but this I can tell you," proceeded Captain Torrens, who was certainly "very garrulously given," "he was awfully down on his luck when we left England, and for the first month or so in Brazil—something on his mind, and not a word to throw to a dog!—and he used to be such a cheery fellow."

"Looked as if he was in love," said Mr. Spiller, with a laugh. "Eh? Miss Brown, what do you say?" appealing to Helen, with a broad grin.

But Helen was past all power of distinct utterance, and a ghastly imitation of his own smile was her only reply.

"And this was confirmed," he proceeded, dropping his voice confidentially; "when we were at sea, and he was delirious—for, at other times, he was very reserved and close about his affairs—but when he was off his head he was constantly muttering about some letter!" very impressively. "Always asking for it—if it had come. It was really painful to listen to him, and to witness his anxiety; he would declare, over and over again, that it had come, and I was keeping it from him, and all sort of things. He used to try and get up and search for it—and, altogether, was so mad on this one subject that I made up a counterfeit effusion—directed it in a lady's hand—sealed it—and gave it to him at last, to be rid of his incessant and wearisome questions!"

"Well!" inquired the other gentleman, with raised brows; "did that calm him?"

"Partly. He was too weak to open it, or read it; so I put it under his head; and he was quite content as long as he felt it in his hand."

"Poor beggar! And are you sure it was a letter from a woman—maybe it was about money, just as likely—and from a man!"

"You may be right!" replied Captain Torrens, with a little sarcastic bow; "but I have never yet met a man of the name of Helen!"

"Oh! was that her name! And, when he came to his senses, what did he think of the little joke you played on him about her letter—about the dummy one, eh!"

"Oh, when he began to come round, I just slipped it away when he was asleep. I fancied one day that I saw him searching for it; but no doubt, poor fellow, he fancied he *dreamt* it."

"And, of course, you never undeceived him—eh?"

"Need you ask?" returned Captain Torrens, contemptuously.

"Well, it was a very interesting recital on the whole!" turning to Helen. "Was it not, Miss Brown?"

"Oh—very!" she replied, with a vast effort—an effort that was not noticed by her companions. To them she had merely appeared silent, preoccupied, and uninterested.

"Torrens, Lady Darville is calling you—don't you see her gestures of appeal? You had better go and see what she wants—and I'll take your chair!"

"Now, Miss Brown," continued Mr. Spiller, in a tone of friendly confidence; "did you ever hear such a sieve in all your life as that fellow? He is as bad as old Hall."

"I think Lynn showed a vast amount of discretion in keeping his affairs to himself—and, from what I know of him, he would be in a towering passion if he dreamt that Torrens had been lifting the veil from his little heart secrets for our amusement—of course being all safe with us. You don't know Lynn, I suppose? Awfully nice fellow—often wondered what he saw in that chattering idiot!"

"Oh! are you going? No doubt you must be rather anxious to get rid of your habit, so I won't press you to stay; but this half-hour before dressing is just the most deadly time in the day! I hate it like poison! I am too sleepy to read—too hungry to talk—"

"Well!" rising, and picking up her whip politely; "au revoir!"

(To be continued.)

PERSONAL EXERTION is the first, the second and the third virtue. Nothing great or excellent can be acquired without it. A good name will not come without being sought. All the virtues of which it is composed are the result of untiring application and industry. Nothing can be more fatal to the attainment of a good character than confidence in external advantages. These, if not seconded by your own endeavours, will drop you midway, or perhaps you will not have started when the diligent traveller will have run the race.

THE USE OF WHALEBONE.—The principal application of whalebone now is that in making whips and corsets. Steel has mostly displaced whalebone in umbrellas and parasols. Some years ago umbrella ribs were made in France of an excellent imitation of whalebone (not distinguishable, indeed, till fractured); but it is no longer heard of. Genuine whalebone is often made white and used with garments of muslin or the like, not being seen through these so easily as the dark sort. The newest application of whalebone is that to hats; it is cut into fine strips and interlaced with straw. Such hats are very dear. Another novelty is "whalebone ribbon." For this white whalebone is generally used, and the shaving is so thin that ordinary print can be read through it. It is often coloured blue, red or green, and used by saddlers in making rosettes. Walking-sticks of whalebone are also in good demand. The exceptionally thick strips cut for this purpose are rounded by being drawn through holes in a steel plate. Billiard pads of whalebone must be very smooth, and cut of a certain exact thickness. Fishing-rods are made of two carefully worked strips of whalebone with thick silk thread wound round them. Pen-holders and other small articles are made of whalebone at the lathe. The hair cut off the raw whalebone was formerly used for brushes, but it is now mostly replaced by other materials. It is largely crimped and used as a filling for mattresses. This list by no means exhausts the uses of whalebone, which is continually applied in new ways.

BROWN AS A BERRY.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"How do you like India?"
The common-place question, drawled out in a languid, unemotional voice behind her, makes Berry jump up from her seat. To her surprise it is Mr. Blythe who stands there, with outstretched hand and a friendly smile.

He looks so calm and unruffled, so exactly as if he had just emerged from his cabin on board ship, that she cannot refrain from a little hysterical laugh as the memories come surging up into her heart of a past in which he played a minor part instead of being its hero as he had planned.

"Won't you shake hands?" he says, coaxingly.

"Of course I will! Why not?" frankly abandoning her fingers to his grasp.

"Why not, indeed! It would in my opinion have been a very objectless piece of cruelty to have refused."

He sits down on the seat beside her and with comfortable familiarity draws away her fan.

"Let me do it. I can flirt a fan as well as any Spaniard!"

And, on proof, his words confirm themselves, the long, slow, sweeping waves bringing more wind than all Berry's short, vigorous jerks have been able to effect.

It is a day when even to breathe is an exertion. There is no sun, only a warm, grey haze rising from the valleys and obscuring the distant hills, and not one single breeze springs up to refresh and cool the lambent air.

Even the badminton players seem to have lost their energy to-day, and the dancers stop every now and then to gasp for breath.

In neither amusement does Berry join. She has been forced hither to give colour to the supposed passion for gaiety which she has affected in order to draw her sister more from home, but at the last moment with annoying perversity Eve has slipped out of it, and stayed away. Berry feels that she has fallen into her own trap, and is justly indignant at her misfortune.

"Do you enjoy yourselves in this deadly-life-like fashion every afternoon?" asks Mr. Blythe, with assumed interest.

"It is a rule with very few exceptions. We are so afraid of seeming bored with each other, that we don't mind being it."

"I see you do not like India!" drily.

"No!"

There is a metallic sound in her voice that shows him he has touched on a sore subject. He looks at her curiously. What has the country done to so awaken her resentment? He cannot guess that the most serious perplexities that have entered her young life can be to her here, and that she is dreading more what still might come.

"After all there are less pleasant places!" he remarks, thoughtfully.

"I daresay!" doubtfully, and then: "The roses are very fine here," with the air of one who is doing Murray for a visitor's delectation.

"Indeed! I have not noticed. The only ones I looked for I missed!" glancing meaningly at the pale cheeks into which, for the first time, a colour slowly rises. Her eyes droop too beneath his scrutiny.

"The heat is very great, greater than usual this year, they tell me. When did you come up?"

"Only yesterday, late in the afternoon: I should have been here before only my gharrie broke down and the coolies, instead of putting their shoulders to the wheel like men, sat down and passed the bubble-bubble round. They said it was Kismet; I said it was—fiddle-dee-dee!"

"They do not care for much work," smiling a little at the evident substitution of a milder or a stronger word.

"My experience is, they do not care for any, so long as they have a *piece* in their pockets."

"Tell me, what has brought you here?"

"Yourself, in the first instance; and, secondly, I have come to look after the Governor-General. He wanted some one trustworthy, so they sent me."

"You are the new A.D.C.?"

"Exactly; I cannot but admire your perspicacity. By-the-bye, I saw another of your admirers on the way up."

"I did not know that I had even one."

"Miss Cardell, did you do me the injustice to doubt my words when I spoke to you that day?"

"No, no!" she interposes hastily, fearing a repetition of his proposal. Whom did you see?"

"Captain Carew; he mentioned you."

"It was very kind of him to remember. Was he looking well?" she asks, trying to keep all bitterness and eagerness out of her voice.

"Very well. They say he has become quite a lady's man of late—quite a general admirer. Formerly, on board ship, you know, he only admired *you*!"

"Or said he did—which is not always the same thing."

"Hai! have you discovered it already? Have you found out from personal experience that men were deceivers ever, and are *still*?"

"I don't know what you mean! I think you are very absurd," flushing angrily.

"Think me anything you please—only not false and *not* forgetful."

But Berry will not listen to him longer; she rises from her seat and moving quickly away is met by Laurence Le Sage.

"Will you dance with me, Miss Cardell?"

"Yes, I will," she returns with such vicious emphasis that he is startled.

"I beg your pardon?" he says, questioningly.

"I mean I shall be very pleased," she answers in some confusion.

The next moment they are waltzing round the room, and Mr. Blythe, having followed them inside, stands idly watching her. She dances so differently from the rest—with such old-fashioned simplicity and modesty, and yet gracefully too, doing nothing but justice to the tiny feet, that keep twinkling in and out. Mr. Blythe finds himself admiring the verve of her movements infinitely more than the style which he has hitherto affected. The other women seem vulgar and *outre* in comparison as they cling so languidly, and sway backwards and forwards with such lingering steps. Even Mrs. Lee-Brooke, no whit behind the fashion, clutches her partner with convulsive closeness as she whirls round the room in his embrace.

"I always feel so thankful, when I watch them dance, that I have no sisters and no wife," says Captain Burdett, addressing himself to Mr. Blythe, whom he had met the night before at the club.

"Humph!" returns Mr. Blythe with a certain doubtfulness, not having quite such strict ideas upon the subject, and not feeling such intense gratitude for the lack of a helpmate.

"Perhaps the style is rather *warm*," he continues as the other does not speak again. "It reminds me of Dante's seventh circle in Hell, where the lost spirits are swept unresistingly before the whirlwind."

"The whirlwind of passion," sententiously.

"I suppose so. Women out here deteriorate sadly," shaking his head with a new accession of virtue as he feels the wisdom of his choice.

"Are they so faultless at home?"

But Mr. Blythe is off in a dreamland, in which he and Berry figure as man and wife, and having sown all his wild oats he is content to live in an atmosphere of morality to which, perhaps, distance lends enchantment. It is out of the bounds of probability that she will refuse him twice.

"I quite agree with a saying of Lord Melbourne's, that it requires very strong health to put up with women at all," says Captain Burdett again, delighted with his apparently appreciative audience; but both audience and

appreciation fail him now as Berry and Mr. Le Sage stop beside them.

He whistles softly to himself as he notes Mr. Blythe's evident *empressemment* and the manner in which it is received. Although he sees at first glance that there is no love on Berry's side, in his own mind he does not question the issue, knowing how many of England's daughters are yearly sacrificed or sacrifice themselves before Mammon's altar.

"I am going home," says Berry, a few minutes later, when the band, after a final clash of instruments, stops short. My brother-in-law is out and Eve will be alone."

"Let me escort you?" whispers Mr. Blythe, eagerly.

"And me!" says Captain Burdett, with an idea of at least staving off the unhappy end he takes for granted is in store for the girl he has known so long, and liked better, perhaps, than any other.

The women look after her a trifle enviously as she moves away between her double bodyguard, laughing happily at the light badinage which passes to-and-fro. Is she going to pit her strength against theirs, which is already wan after the season's turmoil? The contest is scarcely fair, as is shown in the outset by her speedy appropriation of the two most personable men present. Mrs. Lee-Brooke shrugs her shoulders spitefully as she relates all she knows to Berry's disadvantage, and finding such willing listeners ultimately succumbs to the temptation to invent.

Meantime, Berry, having no notion that gossip is already busy with her name, is freer to-day from care than she had been since she came. Ronald is going, or indeed must be already gone, and all anxiety on Eve's behalf can cease. Her own is a legitimate sorrow that it is no sin to indulge even were she not too healthily minded to allow it to become a morbidness.

She is more like the Berry of old, and Anthony Burdett wonders whether, after all, he is misaken, and she can really return this man's affection. Somehow, he does think it likely. In spite of his good looks and well-built figure, there is a something in Mr. Blythe's bold brown eyes that would be more likely to repel than attract the fancy of so young and pure a girl. It is only women of mature age who seek the new excitement of loving a "splendid sinner" or marrying a "reformed rake."

At the entrance of Colonel Chester's compound they stop, and Berry holds out her hand in farewell. Captain Burdett takes it, but Spencer Blythe only bows over it gravely.

"If I might be allowed to pay my respects now to Mrs. Chester—" he suggests, suavely,—"if the lateness of the hour—"

Berry having no objection to offer, together they go towards the house, and, for a wonder, silently; Mr. Blythe being engaged in deep speculation as to the advisability of speaking again soon or leaving it for a time. Unwarned by his past experience, he still has a large faith in his own attractions and little fear for his fate.

When they came in sight of the verandah he stops suddenly and lays his hand on the girl's arm.

"Does your ayah often amuse herself like that? and don't you think it rather a dangerous pastime?" he whispers, in what for him is rather a flurried tone.

Following the direction of his gaze she sees the woman they have so mistrusted and disliked crouching on the ground and peering through the window. She has moved away the corner of the chick the better to indulge her curiosity, but now, as she hears the footsteps behind her, she is on her feet in a moment and with a dimly pretence of flicking off some dust from her petticoat, glides rapidly away.

"Why did you not take her to task?" asks Mr. Blythe indignantly.

"What would have been the good? She knows I cannot scold her, and that even if I

asked her what she was doing there, I should not understand her answer."

Struck by the weariness with which she speaks, Mr. Blythe turns and regards her keenly. All the light has faded from her face with the hope from her heart. She has seen a man's horse being led up and down and recognizing it, understands that Ronald is inside, and that it was his movements and Eve's that the Ayah was so curiously watching. She does not look for a motive in the action at present; she only realizes the shame of Eve being even suspected of wrong-doing. Heaven grant that the suspicion has not been verified!

CHAPTER XXV.

HALF AN HOUR later the door of Berry's room is pushed quickly open and Eve stands on the threshold.

Eve, with white face and shaking hands, and words trembling on her lips that she knows not how to utter. It seems as if all the beauty had been frightened from her face, and she looks as nearly plain as it is possible for her to do.

"Well, what is it?" asks Berry, coldly.

She had been so vexed with her sister's folly and Ronald's weakness that she had not had patience to address herself to either—simply ushering in Mr. Blythe and leaving them directly.

She is in no mood now to listen to the outpourings of confidence that she expects, nor to sympathize with Eve's sorrow at a parting that should have taken place long ago.

"It—is—all—ver!" gasps Eve, hoarsely.

"You have been mad to let it go on so long!" sternly.

"You do not understand. It is that he—Alex—knows everything!"

Then Berry grasps the whole situation, and is aroused from her indifference at once.

"It was the ayah!" she exclaims.

"Yes, how did you know?"

"I saw her looking in at your window when I came home."

"Then she did it purposely!" cries Eve, with an angry quiver, boding ill for the woman should she appear just then.

"Did what?"

"I must tell you all. After you left the room Mr. Blythe did not stay long, and Ronald and I were left alone again. He told me then how you had been speaking to him and persuaded him to go. I cannot help thinking it was unwarrantable interference on your part."

"I did it for the best," meekly.

"I wish you had let it alone. We were all right before you came. You might have left me the poor consolation of his presence—the blessed knowledge of his love. I was nearly mad when he told me he must go; and when I saw him striding down the path I could not bear it; it seemed as if he were passing away from me for ever. So I scribbled a few lines on a scrap of paper and sent it after him—by the ayah."

"And she?"

"She gave it to my husband!"

"Did he read it?"

"Yes!"

"Well, what then?" breathlessly.

"He was coming in, but directly he read it he turned and went back again, and I ran straight to you, Berry! Berry! what shall I do? How can I meet his eyes?"

"You should have thought of that before!" is on the tip of Berry's tongue, but she refrains from upbraiding her sister while in such despair. Instead she says,—

"Tell him the truth, dear, and ask him to forgive. Then you can begin life afresh, and with a better chance of happiness."

"Confess, when I am found out!" answers Eve, scornfully; "he would value that at what it would be worth. If I had gone to him at first—"

"Ah! true."

Eve has sunk into a seat, and Berry sits on a stool before her, her head resting on her two hands and her elbows planted on her knees.

Her big eyes are full of dismay at the domestic tragedy which threatens.

Presently Eve begins again.

"If I thought the ayah had done it purposely, I—I would kill her!" she says, clutching her small hands and setting her teeth hard together.

As she speaks, through the open window comes the sound of a low, crooning, sing-song melody, such as natives sing to soothe a child to rest. Not a tremor is in the voice, not a hair breadth's departure from the usual monotonous tones.

"It is the ayah singing to baby," says Berry, jumping to her feet, and craning her neck through the window in a vain effort to see.

"Yes, it is she; I know the voice!"

"Then surely she cannot have meant it!"

"I don't know," answers Eve, doubtfully; "she may have made a mistake. I told her to run quickly and give it to the Sahib."

"Mentioning no name?"

"No; she had seen him leave the house a minute before so I did not think it necessary."

"She may have made a mistake," says Berry, repeating Eve's words.

"Yes, she may. But what does it matter? what can anything matter now that Alex knows all? And oh! Berry, he is home, I hear him in our room!"

Eve's terror is pitiable to see. She crouches on the floor and raises her hands to Berry in a mute call for aid, not daring to speak lest she should be discovered. Then Colonel Chester's footfall is heard outside, lingering as though hesitating whether to ask if his wife is there. He stops before the open door, nothing but the hanging purdah intervening between himself and the white, anguished face of his erring wife. Then he passes on and both women breathe freely again, as, for a time at least, the danger is evaded.

"I want time—time for thought," gasps Eve.

"And he is dining at the Club to-night?"

"Yes, we have quite three hours left us to devise some means of escape."

"What possible chance is there of that? It is your own handwriting that condemns you," is the hopeless reply, and Berry returns to her former seat, adopting her old attitude.

For a long time there is silence; Colonel Chester has gone out, and his wife sits tearfully watching the clock dreading his return, knowing that nothing can save her then from his just resentment.

Berry's hand slips into hers and clasps it closely, as though she would protect her if she could. But what can she do? Each moment they picture the injured husband in more terrible guise, fancy painting him in her angriest and most lurid colours, and fear lending him such exaggerated proportions that no change in his appearance could have surprised them had he returned then.

Presently Eve starts, as a sudden idea strikes her; but she does not lift her head as she puts it into words.

"Your writing is very like mine," she stammers, with a slight catching of her breath.

"I do not write so well," is the modest reply, not yet seeing where the motive of the remark lies.

"Perhaps not; but in a moment of excitement—"

"I do not understand."

"I mean I did not write my best, and it might easily be believed if you said that you had written it."

"I write a love-letter to Ronald May!" exclaims Berry, accentuating each word in her intense scorn.

"And there is no signature," goes on Eve, quickly, not daring to reason, only looking into her sister's face, with eyes that are pleading as though for dear life. "Save me! save me! you can if you will!"

She falls on her knees and clasps Berry round the feet, the tears streaming from her lovely eyes in uncontrollable torrents. The violent sobs are shaking her fragile frame so cruelly

that Berry—Berry with her strong, young limbs and healthy equilibrium, who has not known a day's illness in her life—is frightened.

"Hush! you will hurt yourself."

"And if I do?"

"For your own health's sake refrain!"

"My health; what is that? Nothing in comparison with my honour. I shall lose all I value in the world if I am turned from my husband's home—and what other fate can I expect? Berry, have you never seen those women hovering on the borderland of society, against whom nothing can be proved, but of whom the worst is suspected? Do you wish me to become such a one?"

"No, no—a thousand times no! I will stay with you always and defend you with my last breath!"

"Do not let that be necessary. Say you wrote that letter and save me."

"With a lie?"

"What of that? A lie is sometimes more noble than the truth."

"Oh! Eve, I cannot!"

"Then the consequences be on your own head. It is you are sinning now—driving me to my fate."

She moves towards the door and would have gone, but fearing she knows not what Berry stretches out her hand and holds her fast.

"Eve, where are you going?"

"To Ronald; he is my last hope. If he forsakes me too, I shall be desolate indeed."

"Are you mad?" whispers the girl, hoarsely.

"I daresay!"

"Or only wicked—dreadfully, fearfully wicked!"

"Perhaps that, too; but he is my last hope," she repeats doggedly.

"Eve—Eve, for our mother's sake, because it would grieve her so!"

A spasm passes over the set white face, but she does not offer to come back.

"And your child?"

"Oh, Heaven! my child!"

She is conquered now, and the healing tears fall again in showers, as she remembers what for a time she has forgotten—the young life so closely knitted with her own. Her loss must be also his. In the far-off time, when he shall have become a man, what could compensate her for the agony of seeing him blush to own his mother. Nay, even if she did she could leave no memory behind that he can cherish, only shame—awful, yet deserved, shame.

Weak as she has been, or only strong to do evil, womanhood is not dead within her, and the mother's love triumphs over all.

She will make one more appeal, and if that fails she will face her husband's wrath fearlessly and proclaim her innocence to the very last. She is innocent, thank Heaven; and not the most malignant malice can rob her of that knowledge—the most precious heritage for her child.

"Berry! won't you help me for baby's sake?"

"Yes, I will do my best. Tell me, what it is you wish me to do?"

In her own mind Berry has pictured with sympathetic sensitiveness, and almost realized what Eve must be feeling now, the agony of knowing that she has forfeited her happiness by her own folly, and that there can be no hope in her husband's mercy.

Colonel Chester would have no pity for the woman who should disown his name.

Instinctively she feels that, and in a moment has taken her resolve.

Eve has all—she nothing to lose. She speaks very quietly, but it is a quietude more terrible than tears.

"Tell me what it is you wish me to do?"

Eleven o'clock, and simultaneously with the sound of its short, booming strokes the outside door opens and Colonel Chester enters the house.

The two women, who are waiting with such burning impatience for his advent, longing, yet dreading, to get the ordeal over, exchange

frightened glances one with another. The three hours have seemed like three days, so long and wearisome have they been; but now they are ended how gladly would both live them again rather than face the coming danger.

The reality seems even worse than what they had pictured to themselves it would be.

Eve's book falls into her lap, and she has not strength to lift it up; but Berry, whose nerves are more tightly strung, goes on working steadily.

Colonel Chester comes in slowly, and makes no attempt to hide his wrath—the worse that it has been so long pent.

A footstool that stands in his way is savagely kicked aside, and his expression is so fierce that his wife trembles.

"You are home early, Alex," she says, with an effort.

"Too early, I daresay! Permit me to present you with a piece of your own property. It seems a pity that such a valuable literary production should have passed from the author's hands!"

He speaks with terrible politeness, like the quiet that precedes a storm.

Eve quakes still more, and inwardly vows that should she have the good fortune to escape now that never again by such misdeeds will she put herself in his power.

Mechanically she takes it from his hand and reads it as though never seen before, but each word stings her with reproach, and stands out from the paper like a flame of fire—the shadow of that gleaming sword which the accusing angel held as he drove our first mother out from Paradise.

"Berry, is this yours?"

It seems as if she must give her sister this one chance to retreat from her promised self-sacrifice—as though she dare not accept it without—and yet her heart beats fast with fear as to the result. But Berry is not one to put her hand to the plough and then turn back; her word has been given and, right or wrong, the lie must be spoken now.

"Yes."

No more than the syllable of assent. Not for her life could she force more from her parched throat; but that is enough for the purpose, and as she takes the note and crumples it in her hand, Eve heaves a sigh of relief. The danger is past and the burden—how heavy the shadow of that gleaming sword which the accusing angel held as he drove our first mother out from Paradise.

"In that all, Alex?"

He glares from one to the other, as a tiger might look that has been balked of his prey. Then a new idea strikes him. "Not quite all. I should still like to know one thing, namely, how it was that your hand and not your sister's was the one to transmit that valuable document to the ayah, who by an unfortunate mistake passed it on to me?"

But Eve has recovered herself now, and answers without hesitation.

"Berry gave it to me to give to her."

"A roundabout way to send a love-letter. Let me congratulate you, Miss Cardell, on its safe return to your hands, and at the same time counsel you to think twice before allowing it to reach its destination."

Berry accepts the taunt meekly, her head still bent over her sewing, and not venturing to defend herself lest her work be all undone. It would not have comforted her to know that it has only half succeeded in its object, that his doubts are not dispelled by her assertion, although compelled to accept it as the truth for want of contrary evidence.

Indeed a man with less keen insight might have discovered that all was not right.

Berry bears herself bravely, but her crimson face and shaking hands betray the fact that something else is troubling her besides the intercepted letter; and Eve is as white as a sheet.

All her better feelings are aroused by the cruelty of the implied aspersion on her sister for lack of maidenly reserve, and she springs

to her feet indignantly. But the eager disclaimer dies away on her lips as she confronts the cold, scrutinising light in her husband's eye.

He draws the purdah aside, standing back to let her leave the room—and like a child powerless to dispute his will, she goes.

Then he turns again to Berry, an evil sneer still hovering on his lips.

"Good-night, Miss Cardell, we will not longer intrude on your doubtless pleasant thoughts."

The purdah falls, and she is left alone with her outraged modesty and pride.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It seems a mockery when Berry awakes next morning that she finds so much the same. The faint watery beams of a sun that has struggled through the rain fall across the floor, and Eve's ayah stands before her smiling and respectful, apparently unconscious that she has given any cause for doubt or offence. As Berry opens her eyes she salams, and puts down a small tray on the table near her bed, on which, besides the inevitable tea and toast, the chota haziri, which forms so important a part of an Anglo-Indian's day's routine, receives an English letter.

It is from Mrs. Holmes, and as Berry peruses it with tearful eyes, contrasting that time with this, a wild wish comes into her mind that she had accepted the honest love which had been offered to her then, and so escape the evil days into which she has fallen. Yet the letter comforts her, telling her as it does of the kind thoughts with which she is remembered, and assuring her that a welcome is waiting for her whenever and however she chooses to come.

"John has told me all," writes the mayor's kindly wife, "and I do not wonder at his choice. We did not know how dear you had grown to us all until we came to miss your cheerful presence. India is a terrible climate, so I hear, and am selfishly hoping that it may drive you back to us. Come when you will you shall find a home and parents as loving as though you had indeed been the daughter you refused to be. John is too sensible to grieve long for what is beyond his reach."

All this is consoling, all except that last sentence. No woman at any time likes to think that the loss of herself is not a lasting pain, and just now it would be doubly sweet to hear that someone would love her always, and believe in her whatever happened.

"Even he thought the worst of me once," she thinks the "he" in this case meaning the lover she has loved so dearly and proved false. "So there must be something in me inherently bad."

The only love it seems as if she could keep is that of Spencer Blythe, and she scarcely deems it a tribute to her worth that she has triumphed there.

When she goes down to breakfast she looks so white and woe-begone that Eve's heart aches for her, and yet she cannot help her. She can only listen with angry distaste to the cold and cutting sarcasms to which Colonel Chester gives vent at every possible opportunity.

When at last Berry leaves the room hastily, unable to bear more, she casts one glance of disdain at her husband, and follows.

She goes straight to her sister's room, and finds her near the window, looking with thoughtful eyes towards the snows that lie beyond. She turns, and smiles bravely as she meets Eve's compassionate gaze.

"Berry, how will you bear it?"

"Well enough. Better, perhaps, when I am more accustomed to it."

"You ought not to be subjected to such insulting scorn. It is monstrous."

"It is just. Believing what he does he could scarcely view me with much favour."

Berry had read the letter almost unconsciously while that terrible scene was being

enacted, and it had been a bitter trial not to disclaim its ownership at once. Pare-minded and undemonstrative almost to coldness, the words which to Eve had meant comparatively little, in her call up an agony of shame. That passionate prayer for Ronald's return, and impulsive declaration that she cannot live without him, are ringing still in her ears; the very memory makes her face burn and she dared not return, when Colonel Chester taunted her, lest he should quote from that letter and make her even more ashamed. Her accent of reproach, as she admits the justness of his scorn, touches Eve to the quick, and she hangs her head.

"Would you like to go away?" she asks, humbly.

"Where?"

"To Lucknow, and stay till we come. All this will be forgotten then."

"To stay with the Sowerbys, you mean?"

"If you like."

"I do not like. I hated it before."

"Then with the Hallers."

"Heaven forbid. A woman who never in her life used a diminutive, and has not for gotten the grammar she learnt at school!"

"Then what will you do?" helplessly.

"Remain where I am if you will have me. Why should I run away?"

She speaks lightly enough and apparently with no intent, but when Eve tries to combat her resolution she is firm. She has determined not to leave her sister, at any rate, until all shall once again be smooth and danger that has threatened is over for ever.

To her Ronald and Eve seem like two children, who, having played with fire, must henceforth be carefully watched. She does not hold them responsible for their deeds, having somewhat contemptuously decided that they are too weak to be really wicked.

It comforts her to think that it is only Eve's foolishness which has led her to err, and that that, too, may perhaps account for the writing of that *dreadful* letter.

They stay in all that day, nor does Colonel Chester leave the bungalow except to pace the verandah restlessly, always in sight of the windows, so the sisters are not again left alone.

He is in the drawing room ostensibly perusing the latest *Pioneer* when the bearer brings in a card on a salver. Eve grasps it nervously and the colour mounts into her as she reads.

"The door is shut," she falters, making use of the less courteous but more truthful phrase that in India takes the place of our English "not at home."

"May I see?" asks Colonel Chester, stretching out his hand.

"Certainly! Why not?"

But she did not offer to give it him, merely laying it on the table, and resuming the whispered conversation she has been holding with the baby on her knee.

Colonel Chester mutters an ejaculation that sounds like a sweeping condemnation of women in general, as he rises and goes for it himself.

"Why was he not admitted?" he asks, angrily.

"Really I did not know you wished to see him, and I dislike receiving visitors when the room is made into a nursery," answers Eve, coldly, glancing at an unoffending rattle lying on the floor, the only object which gives colour to her remark.

"Pshaw!"

But his incredulity is of little account now, Ronald May having by this time gone too far to be overtaken, and for the present Eve has escaped the ordeal it would have been to have spoken to him under her husband's eyes.

He is as vexed as she is relieved.

"On this occasion you might have made an exception. The young man's eligibility should have pleaded for him," he goes on disagreeably, "not to mention your sister's confessed partiality. I am afraid you are making only a sorry chaperone."

The flash he encounters from Berry's angry eyes only spurs him on to fresh indulgence of

his malice, but he bends his head with gentlest courtesy as he delivers his next sting.

"Forgive me if, having surprised your secret, I am perhaps indelicately anxious to forward your interests. Having tasted the delights of matrimony I naturally wish that others should be as fortunate—like the fabled fox who, having lost his brush, persuaded the jeering vulpine crew that his was the happier condition!"

"I do not follow you quite!" says Eve, surveying him with unmixed disfavour.

"Perhaps my simile was not a happy one! At least, I have ample compensation for the lack of freedom in possessing you—a valuable possession I hope not soon to lose!"

"Lose!" echoes his wife, faintly.

He shrugs his shoulders.

"There is always a certain risk in possessing valuable of any sort, and an old man who has married a young wife can hardly be too careful of his prize, even when he has perfect confidence in her loyalty and truth!"

Then with smiling eyes, but a sinister expression round his mouth, which, could they have seen, would have told them much, Colonel Chester bows pleasantly and leaves the room.

"I shall end by hating him," whispered Berry, in a smothered voice.

"I began by that; it was my error and misfortune both."

In her dread lest Eve should say more and afterwards retract, Berry rallies, and quickly changes the subject.

They go to a ball that night, a ball given by the bachelors in the station, and as they enter the room, both leaning on Colonel Chester's arms, few would guess that the handsome trio represents so disunited a home.

Colonel Chester is always suave and companionable, besides possessing a face and figure that would at any place attract admiring notice. His wife is the beauty of the season, and is the more in request that she so seldom appears in public; while Berry, though having no real claims to beauty, is sufficiently quaint and bright to win for herself the most flattering comments, and as many claimants for her hand as she can conveniently satisfy.

It is while she is dancing with Mr. Blythe that a faint buzz of excitement passes from one end of the room to the other, and, looking up, she faces the cause of it.

A woman of about thirty or thirty-five years of age, possessing something of the noble beauty of a typical queen and the stature of an ancient goddess, such as Praxiteles painted on Phidias with his marvelous art has carved in stone.

Her long, velvet robes, sable in hue, but chastened with draperies of soft, old lace, fall in simple folds to her feet; her hair, gathered in a coronet above her brow, requires no ornament, and would look as well without the diamond stars that are quivering in it. Were it not for its silvery shade, she would look many years younger, but perhaps not quite so beautiful as now.

It grows so softly on her forehead, and contrasts so strikingly with the dark eyebrows and violet eyes.

"Her face was like a damsel's face,
And yet her hair was grey."

She moves listless among the crowd, a cavalier on either side, glancing from right to left, noticing no one in particular, only bowing with almost royal condescension to the few with whom she is personally acquainted.

"Who is she?" asks Berry, struck by her appearance, and feeling a strange presentiment that in some manner this woman will influence their lives.

Mr. Blythe shrugs his shoulders.

"That is a thing no one can answer with any truth. The best that is known of her is that she is very rich, very charitable, and frequents most gaucheries that are going on; the worst, that she is eccentric and unhappy, and that every now and then she disappears, and is almost forgotten before she turns up again! They say she goes abroad to visit her husband's grave!"

"Then she is a widow?"
"I cannot say. It is all conjecture."
"She is very handsome!"

"About that there is no doubt. I think she grows handsomer every year. Shouldn't wonder if, in her old age, she does not become a professional beauty."

"She is like a beautiful, baleful poison," continues Berry, thoughtfully, not heeding his remark.

Just then the stranger passes Colonel Chester, and her trailing skirts sweep over Eve's white gown, like a cloud across the snow. She turns with a few words of graceful apology; but even as she speaks the colour rushes into her face and as quickly recedes. She would have fallen had she not been leaning on her partner's arm. It proves, however, only a passing weakness; the next moment she is again erect, and moves away with her usual stately step.

When she leaves the room her retreat is so well covered by her expression of bored distaste that none can guess she is fleeing before a memory and a reproach, trying to escape from the pain that has come to life, at sight of a face she had deemed dead to her for ever.

Colonel Chester is as grey as death; more discomposed by this chance encounter than would have been thought possible by anyone acquainted with his usual impassive calm.

He has raised his hand as though to ward the woman off, but it drops now powerless to his side, and he draws his wife quickly away, as though unwilling she should breathe the same air, or pass over the same spot so lately trodden by that other.

Not until she has left the room does he recover he recover his self-possession, and then he passes his handkerchief quickly over his forehead to wipe away the big beads of moisture that have started out. His grey eyes, as they peer suspiciously from beneath his knitted brows, have the look of a hunted animal that, wounded as it is, had strength to reach its den, only to find it destroyed and the last chance gone.

If Berry bears any malice she may gratify it now, for he is suffering as keenly as even she could wish. But there is no such thought in her mind—no wish for revenge, knowing that any blow which falls on him must also strike his wife.

Eve is happily unconscious of all that has happened beyond the stranger's brushing past her, and speaking in excuse.

She looks after her admiringly as she leaves, but feels no curiosity about her, and attributes her sudden change of colour to the heat and crowded room.

Not for a few minutes does she look into her husband's face, and then she is startled by its terrible, even ghostly pallor.

His hand is pressed to his side, and he has bitten his lips so sharply, to prevent a cry, that a thin streak of blood is slowly coursing down his cheek.

"Are you ill, Alex?" she asks, forgetting all fear in her distress at seeing him thus.

"A little; I shall be better presently. It was a spasm at my heart!"

"It must have been terribly bad?" anxiously,

"It was!"

And with this curt assent he dismisses her sympathy and the subject of his illness at one and the same time, entering into conversation with Mr. Le Sage, who happens to be beside him.

Eve is effectually silenced, and questions him no more.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the room, Mr. Blythe is remarking to Berry,—

"I don't know whether you will agree with me or no, but it has just struck me that it is very queer to meet two people of the same name in so small a circle. In fact, I consider it quite a coincidence that the two most beautiful women in the room both should be called *Mrs. Chester!*"

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHEN Eve reaches home that night her child's ayah meets her on the verandah.

"Baba very sick, plenty fever, no drink, no eat!" she exclaims, in terrified distress.

"Where is he? Have you left him alone?" gasps Eve, excitedly, and then, without waiting for a reply, rushes on into her room.

The child is lying in his cot, pale and languid, with half-closed eyes and open mouth, and as the mother lays her hand upon his wrist, she feels the tiny pulse is beating rapidly as though it would tear the delicate skin with its violent throbs.

She sinks on her knees by the bed and calls him by his name, but not even a flicker of the eyelid shows that he has heard or recognised her voice.

"Sh—ah! mem—sahib! Baba sleep."

"Sleeping with those open eyes staring vacantly before him!"

Oh, Heavens! surely a sleep like that means death. What can she do to save him? She turns round helplessly and encounters her own ayah watching her with a wicked expression of satisfaction on her face, which she changes at once for one of mock sympathy and distress.

"Leave the room, instantly!" commands Eve, wrathfully.

The woman affects to misunderstand, only moving a little further away.

"Go. If mem-sahib wants you she will call," adds Berry, and this time she thinks it wiser to obey.

Then Berry turns to Eve.

"Be comforted, dear, he cannot be so very ill in so short a time, and the doctor will be here directly; I have sent for him. It must be a good sign that he is asleep."

"Oh! not like that, Berry. If he would only awake and notice me."

But the next moment she wishes her prayer unsaid. The big blue eyes open wide and the white lips are pressed together in terrible pain, as one convulsion after another seizes the small frame, each more violent than the last. Suddenly they cease, and once again the hands unclench and the child relapses into its unnatural slumber.

Eve has sunk on the floor sobbing, her hands before her eyes, not strong enough to bear the sight of suffering she cannot assuage. Berry, more helpful, is placing cool bandages on his head, and ordering the servants to prepare hot water in anticipation of what the doctor may require. He is not long in obeying the summons sent, but he looks very grave as he stands by the child's bed and notes the rapidly waning strength.

"Will he die?" asks Eve, in an agonized whisper.

"My dear madam, I cannot say. The issue is in Heaven's hands. We can only do our best."

He speaks very gently and with evident compassion for the lovely woman so prostrate in her grief; but his directions are given to Berry, having recognised her at once as the stronger nature of the two.

"I have done all that is possible," he says to her when he leaves an hour later. "I do not think you need fear a return of the convulsion now. The fever is the chief danger. If that abates within the next few hours he may recover yet. You will do as I have told you."

When he is gone the two women settle themselves to watch through the night. Berry has taken off her ball-dress, and having put on a dressing-robe instead, has taken the child into her arms, where she can feel the temperature of his body and judge how he is progressing without disturbing him by such frequent touches. His little dry hands lie listlessly between her soft cool fingers. She would give worlds to feel them growing moist. How would Eve take his loss? Not in resignation she is sure.

Her husband's conduct lately has so alienated her affection that the only safeguard she possesses is her babe. For his sake she had

promised to bear all patiently, but what if this motive be removed? She would not while he lived do ought to cause him shame, but if he died—

Silent, and almost wordless is the prayer she breathes to Heaven for his recovery; but perhaps it is not less efficacious than louder vociferations.

Eve, too, acknowledges all the importance of his life at the same time as she realizes what she would lose by his death. It is an even stronger tie than the mother-love felt by a happy wife, who has no other pain—no guilt to expiate and avoid. A fear, too, has come into her brain that it is in judgment this trial has been given. She is afraid to pray. She deserves no mercy; why should she ask it?

She can only sit and watch, the tears rolling down her cheeks, and her hands, tightly clasped, lying in her lap.

The lamplight flickers on the sheen of her silken gown, and on the golden hair which falls in showers to her knees.

In taking off her wreath it had tumbled about her thus, and she had not yet troubled to gather it again into a knot.

She looks like Grado's Magdalene, only even more womanly and fair.

Once her husband enters, and as he passes his arm around her in an effort to console, an irresistible impulse comes over him to press a lingering caress upon her lips.

The estrangement has been so trying, and his bitterness has hurt himself almost as much as her. He stoops and kisses her once, twice, upon the mouth.

She does not shrink from him, but her indifference is as galling as a more pointed rebuff. It is her child who engages all her attention—all her thought; and when she pushes him aside with unconscious vehemence, the opportunity for reconciliation slips by.

The grey dawn is creeping through the window, when at last Berry utters a joyful cry.

"I would not speak until I was quite sure, but baby's hand has been getting cooler and moister for the last half-hour. I think we have good hopes now!"

The doctor when he comes confirms her opinion.

"The danger is past," he says; "it all depends now upon your care in guarding against a relapse."

The relief is so great that Eve is overcome, and can only weep her thankfulness on her sister's breast, but by-and-by she changes her gown for a more suitable one, and becomes an assistance to Berry, instead of an added anxiety. At first she had been nearly paralysed, like all very weak and loving natures, proving unable to bear the shock of so sudden and keen a grief. Now she rallies and is of real use.

They nurse him carefully all that day, and in the evening, when Eve has him on her knee, and is gazing at him with a rapturous devotion that asks for nothing more, Berry steals away for a little rest.

Colonel Chester looks up as she comes into the room where he is sitting. With all his faults he honestly loves his child.

"Well!" he adds, anxiously.

"It is well, the boy is progressing wonderfully now."

"Thanks to your care!"

"And Eve's."

But Colonel Chester does not reply. He has been softened by the trouble and fear they have shared; but now all danger is over, he only remembers how his advances have been repelled. It angers him to think that having humbled his pride by making the first step towards reconciliation it should not have been eagerly accepted. His wife shows so plainly that she neither desires his love nor dreads his hate. What might have proved a link to knit them closer together has only been the means of further sundering them.

"I should scarcely fancy nursing was Eve's *métier*," he observes presently, with sarcastic emphasis.

Declining to discuss with him his wife's

failings Berry takes up some cards that are lying there.

"Have all these been to-day?" she asks, reading out their names.

"All—and more!"

"I wonder how they heard baby was ill?"

"Perhaps the doctor told them; news so soon spreads. By-the-by, one gentleman was very particular in his inquiries. I met him in the Parase shop. It was Ronald May!"

Berry makes no comment and Colonel Chester continues.

"The strangest thing was that these inquiries were not for you, but my wife."

"That is very likely," laughs Berry gaily, having cast off her care for a time in her relief at knowing that the child is better, and Eve for the present safe. "He would not wear his heart on his sleeve, and you are too unsympathetic to make a good confidant."

He glances at her keenly, and for the first time wonders whether he has done right in doubting her word before. Suppose, after all, the young fellow's attentions to Eve have been really only a blind to cover his courtship to Berry; in that case how he has wronged them both by his unworthy suspicions.

Idly he takes up a book of old plays that has been lent him by Captain Burdett, and as though in answer to his thoughts he lights upon this passage:

"No faith, I dare trust thee. I do suspect thou art honest, for it is so rare a thing to be honest amongst you that some one man in an age may perhaps suspect some two women to be honest, but never believe it verily!"

(To be continued.)

MACREADY'S IRRITABILITY.

The irritability of temper of Macready, the well-known actor, was excessive—indeed, he himself, in his diary, has admitted and deplored the unfortunate infirmity in this respect to which he was subject.

He was, too, a great stickler for historical accuracy, as regards both scenery and costume, in any play in which he appeared, and he invariably insisted upon the other performers, male and female, dressing the characters they represented in strict conformity with his views.

On one occasion, says a writer in the *Theatre*, he was to play *Virginia*, a favourite part of his, and undoubtedly one of his finest impersonations.

Mrs. Coleman Pope was to be the *Virginia*, and, thinking to give herself a more juvenile appearance, she decided to wear ringlets, for which purpose she put her hair in curl papers. During the morning rehearsal, the season being winter and the theatre rather cold and draughty, she kept on her bonnet. Bonnets were bonnets in those days, covering the whole of the head, and coming well forward over the face.

Macready consequently did not observe at the time the condition of her hair.

When night came, however, and he met Mrs. Pope in the green-room, dressed for *Virginia*, and perceived the ringlets, he was horrified.

"My dear madam," he burst out, in his nervous, excitable manner, "this will never do! No Roman woman, maid or matron, ever wore her hair in that style. It must be altered at once!"

"I am very sorry, Mr. Macready, that it does not meet with your approval," was the reply; "but what am I to do? It is too late to make any alteration now. It will curl."

"But it must not, I tell you, madam!" retorted the great tragedian, angrily. "You cannot go on the stage as you are. Ah, I have it!" he continued, after a moment's pause. "Let some one get a bowl of water, put your head in it for a few minutes, and it will no longer curl."

Mrs. Pope was not a little indignant at the suggestion; but Macready was an autocrat from whose decisions there was no appeal, and whose request, or rather command, had to be complied with, the result being that the lady caught a pretty severe cold.

GOOD-BYE.

Once 'twas summer warm and sweet—

Good-bye!

Love, he courted with panther-feet;

Then came jealousy so fleet;

Lo, between came rain and sleet—

Good-bye! Good-bye! Good-bye!

Once you gave me roses red—

Good-bye!

All their flame and perfume fled,

What's a flower when it is dead?

I twined the rue about my head—

Good-bye! Good-bye! Good-bye!

I do not know what changed my heart—

Good-bye!

We were so bitter far apart,

Between us toiled a boisterous mart,

Scorn pierced me with a poison-dart—

Good-bye! Good-bye! Good-bye!

The summer lay 'neath pallid snow—

Good-bye!

Where were the stars, the bloom, the glow?

My love chilled in the winter-woe,

I buried it down deep and low—

Good-bye! Good-bye! Good-bye!

Nay, kiss me ere you turn away—

Good-bye!

My heart broke on that ruined day,

When I found love had turned to clay,

I curse the cruel gods that slay—

Good-bye! Good-bye! Good-bye!

F. D.

THE LILY AND THE ROSE.

CHAPTER XX.

THAT evening—the last they were ever to spend together—Lady Avanley still kept up the fiction which had charmed Alice so much for the last two evenings, and was delightfully motherly and kind. She even said once in the course of conversation,

"I hope nothing will happen to part us now, Alice. I don't mind telling you that I did not anticipate your arrival with much pleasure, because I could not tell, of course, how you had been brought up; but now I know you it is quite different, and I hope nothing will estrange us."

"What should estrange us, Aunt Cecilia?"

"Nothing but your ill-conduct, my dear."

"What have I ever done to lead you to suppose I could behave ill?" inquired Alice, in a hurt tone.

"Nothing. Don't be so sensitive, child; we are discussing possibilities, not probabilities, now."

"But I hope this is not even a possibility, aunt?"

"I hope not, too," answered her ladyship; and glittering as her smile was, it chilled Alice suddenly, in spite of herself, for she reminded her of those sirens who were supposed to lure men to destruction with their cruel beauty. "You are shivering," she added, in her suave voice; "are you cold?"

"No. At least, I think not."

"Then why did you shudder?"

"I don't know. Did I?"

Lady Avanley laughed then. "How odd you are to-night! If this is the result of Charles's visits, I shall forbid him to come in when I am out."

Alice blushed furiously, to the other's great apparent amusement. Leaning lazily back in her chair, and watching her through her half-closed eyes, Lady Avanley continued,

"Let me give you a little word of warning, my dear! Charles Avanley is very young, and, *par conséquent*, fickle, and therefore if he should make love to you don't trust him. He

was devoted to Greta when you first came, as you cannot have failed to perceive; but you had the charm of novelty, and he forsook her, as he would forsake you, if a newer beauty crossed his path."

"I daresay," answered Alice, who tried to keep a brave face in spite of the torture she was enduring. "A young man of that age would naturally have a great many fancies before he settled down."

"Ah! yes, and the worst of them is they don't mind how much they mislead anyone. Indeed, I have heard Charles boast of his conquests—as if he thought it quite a clever thing to deceive a poor girl who trusted him."

Remembering how reticent and modest Sir Charles was upon such subjects, this statement filled Alice with hot indignation. She was ready to believe he had deceived one poor girl, at any rate; but she knew he was the last man in the world to boast of his sin, in spite of anything Lady Avanley might say. At the risk of betraying herself, she was obliged to defend Sir Charles.

"I don't think you are just to him," she said; "he might be led away in the evil example around him, Aunt Cecilia, but I think Sir Charles has a conscience, and never would be happy if he were doing wrong."

"But a young man's conscience is very elastic," answered her ladyship, "and doesn't seem to stand in the way of any of his pleasures."

"Why should it, if they are honest pleasures?"

"Yes, but are they honest, as a rule?"

"I know so little of the world, Aunt Cecilia, I can hardly judge," Alice replied, and was thankful that the clock struck ten at this minute, and she had an excuse for going to bed.

Lady Avanley approved of early hours, as we know, on both moral and physical grounds. It was a good example for the servants, and it was an excellent cosmetic; moreover, it was economical, and saved coals and candles. Like all selfish people, she was a good sleeper, and it was very rare for anything to disturb her rest. She read for a half-an-hour or so—merely from habit—and then she sank into a sound, dreamless slumber, and did not rouse until Marie tapped at her door in the morning, and told her her bath was ready.

Meanwhile poor Alice, who was young, and ought to have found her couch a bed of roses, was tossing wearily from side to side, and longing for the morning light—little guessing that the morning light would bring her such shame and sorrow as she had never pictured yet, even in her worst dreams.

Lady Avanley had not carried her affection so far as to rise in the morning and breakfast with Alice, who sat down to the meal in lonely state, and got it over as quickly as she could.

This morning she had a letter from Sir Charles, written just after he had left her, in which he positively declined to accept her decision as final, and declared he should come for her real answer in a month's time, did not mend matters.

She had read this for the third time when she heard a step in the hall, and was just able to hide it away in her pocket that it might not be accosted with her flushed looks when Marie entered.

"My lady would like to see you, miss, as soon as you have done breakfast," she said, "but she hopes you won't hurry yourself."

"I have done now," replied Alice, swallowing the rest of her coffee in haste, and rising. "Has she left her room?"

"Oh! no, miss—you are to go to her there, if you please."

There was something so extraordinary in this summons it would have alarmed Alice only that she was so preoccupied—it never occurred to her to give it any importance. If she thought about it at all, she supposed her aunt had some commission for the village, or an order for the cook; and so having composed her face she went upstairs, and knocked at Lady Avanley's door.

"Come in," said her ladyship's voice, and

Alice entered, forcing a smile as she bade the other good morning.

To her utter surprise, instead of responding to her greeting, Lady Ayanley looked at her with cold, stony eyes, and pointed to a chair she had had drawn close up to the bed.

"Sit down there," she said, and her voice was as cold as her eyes. "I grieve to say I have heard things about you which make it impossible you should remain any longer an inmate of my house."

Alice sat and stared at her in a stupefied sort of way. She heard her words, but they made no impression on her mind, for Lady Ayanley added impatiently,

"Do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear," answered Alice, then, her hand going confusedly to her head, "but I am afraid I don't quite understand."

"I tell you I have found out things which make it impossible you should remain any longer an inmate of my house, or associate with my daughter."

"What things?" Alice roused herself to say, at last.

Lady Ayanley took up a paper that lay on the bed beside her, and consulted it before she answered.

"In the first place I understand that you are in the habit of meeting gentlemen at all hours—even after dark."

This shameful accusation roused Alice's spirit, and she answered haughtily,—

"That is quite false, Lady Ayanley. I never met any man at any hour of the day or night since I came to your house, or before I came to your house, for the matter of that."

"Facts are stubborn things. You were seen speaking to one about dusk some few evenings ago, and taken for one of the maids, to your utter disgrace and shame."

"It was not pleasant, certainly, but I could not help being addressed. I had never seen the person who spoke to me before."

"A lady does not converse with a stranger, as you ought to know."

"I do know that, of course, but that person—"

"Why don't you call him by his name?"

"Because I don't actually know it."

"But you guess it, I suppose, since you took letters to the post-office—for Greta—addressed to him!"

"I took one letter, and one only."

"That was one too many, and an atrocious act of treachery on your part when you were living in my house."

"I am afraid it was wrong," answered Alice, readily, "but I did not look at the address, of course."

"You must have known there was something wrong about it if it could not be given to me as usual to put in the letter-box."

"I was painfully placed," Alice replied, not wishing to criminate poor Greta in defending herself, "but I have no wish to excuse myself, Lady Ayanley, where I know your reproaches to be justified. But as to meeting men that is perfectly false!"

"Then I may tell Cox it was not you he saw!" she asked, with cruel irony.

"That would not be true either. He did see me, but I had no appointment with Mr. Granville, and had never seen him before, as I told you just now."

"Neither had you any appointment with Charles Ayanley at the Hall the day you went there, I suppose?"

"No!"

"Have a care, Alice Marchmont, for I can bring forward a witness who heard the appointment made."

"Then it would be a false witness."

"What motive could she have for asserting a thing that was not true?"

Suddenly, as if by inspiration, Alice guessed who her accuser was, and said,—

"You mean Bessie Winkle, I have no doubt; but if she heard me promise to go to the Hall she must also have heard me make the conditions that Sir Charles should not be there."

"And langheth in her sleeve at your little precaution."

"It is odd that you should believe this woman in preference to me, Lady Ayanley," observed Alice, coldly.

"I consider her statements amply supported by your admissions, and the evidence of others," she replied. "You did go to Aylesford Hall, according to your own showing, the day she says she heard you make an appointment with Sir Charles Ayanley. You also acknowledge that you took Greta's letter to the post-office—and you called there twice, I believe, for Philip Granville's answer."

Alice was silent.

"Is this true or not?" pursued her ladyship.

"It is true that I called for letters—it is also true that I went to Aylesford Hall; but Mrs. Bennett, who showed me over the house, can tell you that Sir Charles was not there at the time."

"I shall not certainly ask her, for it is not seemly to mix so many common people up in the matter."

"And yet you questioned Cox and Bessie Winkle?"

"I have never questioned them. Cox thought it right I should know how you were going on, and commissioned Marie to tell me last night. Bessie Winkle wrote this morning. If you could have denied their statements I should have been only too thankful; but as you confirm them in the main, I am forced to hold to my original intention, and beg you will leave my house before my poor misguided child becomes further contaminated by your bad example and advice."

"Very well," answered Alice—far too proud to plead even for delay, though this verdict was absolute ruin to her under the circumstances. "You are the mistress here, Lady Ayanley, and whatever you ordain, I am bound to obey; but I hope that you will meet with more mercy than you have shown me."

"You have received far more mercy than you deserve," returned Lady Ayanley—inexorably. "You have disgraced me thoroughly, the short time you have been here. Fancy a young lady stealing the keys, and helping herself to wine out of the sideboard, on the sly!"

"Oh! Lady Ayanley. You must know better than that," exclaimed Alice, indignantly.

Then you mean to deny that Cox surprised you leaving the dining-room with my keys in one hand, and a glass of wine in the other?"

"I fetched a glass of wine for Greta the day her foot was so bad."

"I am surprised, after the affection you have pretended to feel for Greta, you should try and make her responsible for all your faults," returned her ladyship, freezing. "But in this case your shaft falls innocuous; for I know my dear child far too well to believe her guilty of the vulgar vice of drinking."

"As if I accused her of that, Lady Ayanley! She was faint with pain, and asked me to get her a glass of wine. Surely there was no harm in that!"

Lady Ayanley shook her head.

"If Greta wanted a glass of wine what was binder her from sending to me for one?"

"She was anxious you should not know how much she was suffering, as she thought it was only a slight sprain, and did not want any fuss made about it, she said."

"That also bears its improbability on the face of it," was the harsh reply. "Greta was only too glad to remain in her room, and was with difficulty persuaded to come downstairs."

Poor Alice! she felt literally hemmed in, seeing herself that all her explanations were made to sound like treachery against Greta, whom she would fain have shielded, and had shielded all along as much as she could.

"It is useless for me to try and vindicate myself," she answered, with quiet dignity. "I find I was judged before I spoke, and nothing I could have said would have altered your opinion. I see now, Lady Ayanley, that the kind-

ness you have shown me the last few days, and for which I was so grateful, was a mere blind to deceive me—for that you meant to turn me out of your house as soon as you could find a decent excuse."

"What you are saying there is absurd. Is it probable that any woman in her sober senses, especially one who is so proud as I, should seek to criminate her husband's niece, and thus bring disgrace on the name she bears?"

"Yes, if she wanted to get rid of this niece!" answered Alice, whom righteous anger made dauntless now.

"Why should I want to get rid of you?"

"A poor relation is in the way, I suppose!"

"You have never been in my way. I thought at first you might be an undesirable inmate, as I have told you, but when I found you were ladylike and generally presentable, my prejudice wore away. I was even beginning to get fond of you when I found that you had been helping Greta to deceive and disobey me, and were for other reasons besides a dangerous and compromising person to have in the house. As this is the case, I have no alternative but to request you will find another home as speedily as possible."

"That will be to-night!" she answered, superbly. "I would not sleep another night under your roof for all the world, or accept any service from servants who knew that the best way to their mistress's favour is to malice her orphan niece. I should not even wonder if they tried to persuade you that I had stolen your plate and jewels, Lady Ayanley, and I am quite sure that if they did say so, you would believe them."

"Naturally I should if they had as good proof of this statement as they had of the others!"

"I thought as much, and shall not feel safe until I have left the Power House far behind!"

"Of course you can do as you like about this. I should give you three days to make your preparations for departure, and only asked you to leave before Greta's return on the 5th, as I do not choose you two should be together again; but if you like to play the master I will not prevent you. Shall I send Marie to help you pack? I shall not require her for a couple of hours or more, for this affair has worried me so cruelly I do not feel equal to any exertion just yet;" and she sighed plaintively as she raised her hand to her face, which, even in the subdued light that penetrated through the red blind, looked faded and worn for lack of the zephyr of rouge with which she was wont to brighten it when she made her toilette for the day.

Alice rose to her feet feeling strangely giddy, like a person who is only just recovering from a long illness.

"I do not want Marie or anyone!" she said, brokenly; and though she spoke no new word of reproach, the dumb misery in her eyes haunted Lady Ayanley for many a long day afterwards and made her say now,—

"Do you want some money. I could spare you a little?"

Alice shook her head. She could not speak by this time without breaking down utterly, and she did not choose this cruel woman should see her anguish and despair. So she hurried away to her own room, and locking herself in, fell to sobbing and crying as if her heart would break.

She had only five pounds in the world, and what was to become of her when she was thrown upon her own resources? She did not mind working; but where was work to be found?

She had no one to recommend her now that Miss Middleton was abroad, and was it likely any respectable person would admit her into her home, or allow her to teach her young daughters unless she had good references?

Alice saw all the difficulties of her position plainly, and a feeling of absolute despair filled her heart. She sat there helplessly, when she had wept all her tears, and gazed in a stupefied

way at the pattern of the carpet, trying to plan, but feeling too bewildered and overcome.

The luncheon-bell rang, but she did not stir, and presently there came a little timid rap at the door.

She rose to see who it was, and found Sarah, the under-housemaid, standing there with a tray.

"I've brought you up some lunch, miss," said the girl, her blue eyes filling with tears when she saw poor Alice's disfigured face. "And, oh! please do try and eat a little bit. Cook and we all say—"

She pushed the door to with her foot as she spoke, and advanced into the room with her tray, adding in a lower voice—

"Don't take any notice, don't! We don't believe a word of it, miss. Cox and Mrs. Elsie Marry say—the rest of us—I mean—like such shameful and wicked conduct concerning a young lady who is as innocent as a lamb, and always speaks so kind and pleasant to everyone. I give warning this very night if it wasn't for father having so many to keep, and not wanting no extra work at home."

Alice held out her hand to Sarah impulsively. The sympathy of this honest creature was a comfort to her in her trouble, although she were but a servant, and made her feel as if she were not utterly forsaken after all.

Sarah's face glowed with pride at this mark of commendation, and she began to cry in real earnest.

"It's such a shame, miss—such a shame—as servants—be they upper or otherwise—should be allowed to take a lady's character away, and get her turned out of home and home. Marry is jealous of you, that's what she is."

"Nonsense, Sarah! How should she be jealous of me!"

"She never likes any one to be pretty. She said when you first came she believed all your colour was paint."

"At any rate, if she has said no worse—"

"But she has. She was always wanting to tell us things, only we wouldn't let her. The fact is, she hates the country, and is obliged to make mischief for want of something to do. But you will eat a little bit, miss, if only just for me to tell cook. She said she knew you liked her cutlets, and they'd be nourishing before a journey."

Alice began to eat to please Sarah and "cook"; but she was so exhausted she felt better after a few mouthfuls, and was easily persuaded to finish the cutlets, and take a little vanilla cream besides.

Then Sarah carried off the empty tray triumphantly, saying she would come up after dinner and do all the packing if Miss Marchmont would allow her; and Alice accepted the offer gratefully, feeling as if she had need to husband all her poor strength for the journey that lay before her.

When Sarah had finished the packing, Alice would have made her accept a present of money, but Sarah put her hands resolutely behind her.

"I wouldn't take a farthing, miss, if it was to save my life," she said; "but if you should want a servant one of these days, and would let me live with you, I should be proud to serve you, miss, and I'd do my duty, I would, indeed!"

"I am sure you would, and I promise you you shall live with me if ever I have a home," answered Alice, half-amused, in spite of her sadness to find herself making any engagements of this sort; she, who was poorer even than Sarah, since she had no roof to shelter her, and did not even know that she would be able to earn her daily bread.

But there were wonderful chances in this world of change, and why, then, should she despair? At any rate, she must try and face the future, bravely trusting in Providence to befriat her, and trying always to see the silver lining of the heavy cloud that had fallen on her young life.

Lady Avanley went out after luncheon, leaving word with Cox that she should not be

home until late, so that Alice was able to go into the sitting-rooms, and collect her few belongings. She left a letter for Greta pinned to her pincushion, forgetting that it was not very probable she would be allowed to see it; and then the fly which had brought her to the Dower House such a short time before came up to the door, and everything being now ready Alice bade good-bye to the servants, who had collected in the hall to wish her God-speed, and drove away into the darkness, with the tears raining down her cheeks.

CHAPTER XXI.

The third day after Alice's departure Greta returned home, Mrs. Melthorpe bringing her back, and bidding her good-bye at the door, as she had an afternoon engagement elsewhere.

Lady Avanley looked out of the drawing-room as soon as she heard the bell ring, and received the girl in her arms, going into ecstasy over her improved appearance.

"Why, you have almost a colour," she said. "I must ask Mrs. Melthorpe what tonic she has been giving you."

"The only kept Lord Darminster away," answered Greta. "She knew that was the most certain way to make me well and happy too."

"Nonsense, dear, and don't be so public in your distress," she observed, with assumed playfulness.

"Cox isn't here, mamma?"

"No, but he may be within hearing."

"I really don't mind it then," she responded, frankly. "Everyone is welcome in the information that I hate Lord Darminster—like—like—but I could never find a simile half strong enough; how I do hate him—as I never thought it was in my indolent nature to hate any mortal creature under the sun."

"Hush! Greta, you distress and annoy me. Lord Darminster is the kindest friend I have in the world."

"Your friend?" and Greta looked at her mother keenly. "How?"

"I'll tell you all about it one of these days. But come into the drawing-room, Greta, and have a cup of tea. How much better you walk," she added, watching the girl as she crossed the hall. "The limp is almost gone."

"Yes; General Melthorpe declared I had none at all really, but wanted to look interesting. I have even been for walks, at the Elms."

"Not alone, I hope!" said her ladyship, primly.

"Who was to walk with me? The General has had a threatening of gout all the week, and Mrs. Melthorpe, as you know, is quite overcome when she has walked to the carriage and back again. But it will comfort you to hear that I only went out of the grounds once, and then I met no one in society."

"But people out of society can talk, Greta."

"I daresay, but nobody listens to them."

"I can't agree with you there," replied Lady Avanley, in an argumentative tone, as she pushed open the drawing-room door, and bustled up to the tea-table with less than her usual dignity. "I always find that slander gets listened to wherever it comes from."

She spoke quickly, and tried to keep Greta's attention, her one object being to stave off the question she felt must come presently, "Where was Alice?" But knowing that she was in the habit of taking an afternoon walk, Greta was not alarmed as yet, and had almost finished her tea when she said—

"Alice oughtn't to be out so late, mamma, ought she? I don't believe she is a bit strong, although she doesn't like anyone to think so."

Lady Avanley pretended not to hear, as the easiest way of gaining time. Hard as she was, she felt like a coward at this moment, and it seemed more difficult to confess the wrong she had done than to commit the wrong itself.

Greta did not speak again for nearly a quarter of an hour, and then she said, half-complainingly—

"I do wish Alice would come in—I want to

see her so badly. She knew I was coming home this afternoon, I suppose?"

The moment of confession had come, and could no longer be delayed. Lady Avanley cleared her voice, and said with assumed carelessness—

"Didn't I tell you, love, that Alice was gone?"

"Gone! Where?"

And Greta turned right round in her chair to stare surprisedly into her mother's face.

"I really don't know. Under the circumstances I did not ask her to leave me her address."

"Under what circumstances?"

"She behaved very badly, I am sorry to say."

"In what way?"

"I should hardly care to tell your ears with such a story, my dear. It suffices to say that her conduct was very frivolous and reprehensible, and I found it necessary, to my deep regret, to tell her to look out for another home."

"Another home!" echoed Greta, bitterly. "Where is she to find that upon such short notice—she who has no friends?"

"That is not my affair. If she had behaved properly she could have remained here."

"It is my belief," exclaimed Greta, boldly, "that you always intended her to go as soon as you could find a decent excuse, and that I was allowed to leave home in order that matrimony might be arranged quietly."

"I should not have expected you to resist my authority if you had been here," observed her ladyship, grimly.

"I should certainly have taken her part when I knew she was being wronged."

"Is it likely I should wrong my husband's orphan niece?"

"But what had she done then?"

Lady Avanley, thus pressed, was obliged to give a list of her delinquencies, which she exaggerated as much as she dared.

Greta listened without a word, but when her mother had finished she said passionately,—

"You have done a great and cruel wrong, mamma. You have punished an innocent person for my sin."

Lady Avanley looked anxiously about to make sure they were alone, and then she said coldly and sternly,—

"I require no explanation, Greta. There are things it suits me best to ignore."

"But I cannot have another punished for me."

"You should have thought of that before. It is not my fault if I have been unjust, for I was obliged to act on the evidence before me."

"You were bound to judge me, perhaps, but not her."

"Excuse me, Greta, I, as the mistress of this house, am responsible for the conduct of all its members, and those who disgrace me must go."

"Then why don't you turn me out?"

"That is absurd! My daughter is my daughter, and I must hide her offences for my honour's sake. The more shame for her if she shelters herself behind this necessity."

"As far as I am concerned I am sick of deception," answered the girl, wearily. "How can it matter to me what people think or say if only I am happy?"

"I should not fancy you could be happy if everyone looked down upon you."

"Oh! yes, I could, ridiculously happy," she answered, with an hysterical little laugh. "Not in the way you understand, of course, but in my own way, which seems to me better. I have even pictured to myself of late living in two rooms with a man I loved and mending his socks—actually mending his socks—and being just as happy as the day was long."

"Greta!" came in an awful voice from her frightened mother.

"Ah! it is true. I am so tired of show and sham, so tired of talking down my own heart, and trying to appear what I am not.



I would escape from it all even on these terms."

"Greta!" repeated Lady Avanley, "all this after the way I have brought you up?"

"It is just the way you have brought me up that has made me feel like this. I have been so dosed with conventionalities I want to fling them all to the winds."

"Greta, you are excited, and had better retire to your room and compose yourself."

"I never was calmer in my life, mamma. You know I loved Alice Marchmont, and she was a comfort to me, and so you sent her away."

"I considered her a very bad companion and adviser for you, but of course the reason I sent her away—"

"To starve," put in Greta, parenthetically.

"Was on account of her bad conduct," continued Lady Avanley, without heeding the interruption. "It would have been impossible to preserve any sort of discipline in my house if I had allowed her to remain, as the servants knew what she had done."

"I would have told them why she had done it."

"Anxious as you seem to proclaim yourself in the wrong, Greta, I presume you will hardly assert that Alice went to Aylesford Hall on your account."

"It was quite natural she should wish to see her mother's old home."

"I daresay, but people have to curb these natural desires when they are likely to lead them astray."

"Sir Charles was not at home."

"So she said, but I have evidence to the contrary; and, in any case, it was a most unwise and improper thing to do."

"She did not know any better, mamma. You forget she was not brought up in the world, and therefore could not be expected to understand all these little turns and twists."

"She knew quite well she had no right to

go to the Hall. As for her little intrigue with Philip Granville, that didn't trouble me very much, and would have been put a stop to summarily if she had not gone. No girl with any self-respect would have anything to say to him now."

"Why not?" asked Greta, turning like a hunted animal at bay.

"Because he has been taken up for forgery, and is now in prison," answered Lady Avanley, pitifully.

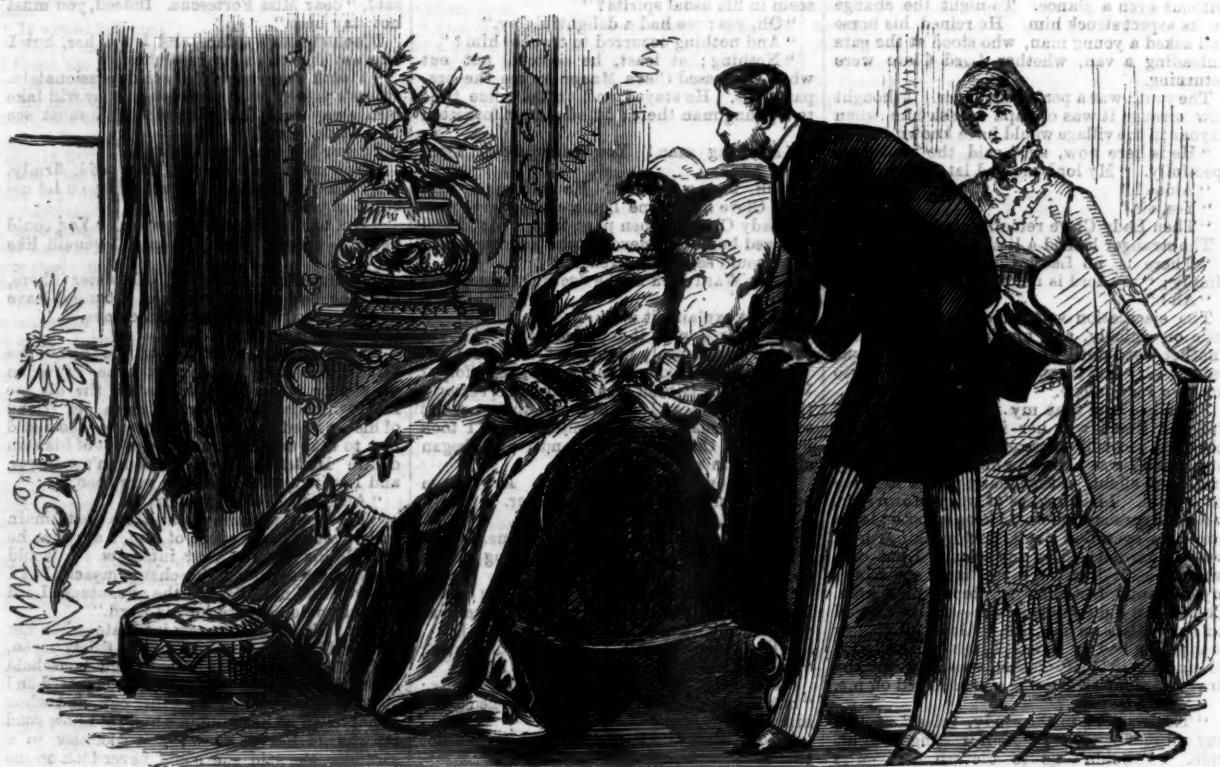
In all the years to come the bitter cry that rose to Greta's white lips, and the look of despair in her eyes, would haunt this woman in the still watches of the night, and make the darkness an anguish to her, when sleep would not come, and she was all alone with her sorrow and her regret.

(To be continued.)

FRENCH MARRIAGES.—They are so unlike anything in the same *couché sociale* in England. All the wrangling about settlements is over, and the happy couples and their relatives and friends lay themselves out to spend the day as merrily as they can. A wedding in France is a union of two families as well as two persons. There have been many hitches and difficulties in the way of fusion, but now that it is taken place it is thorough. The fathers of the bride and bridegroom are *compères*, the mothers *compères*, all the connections are "allies," and the relationship in which they stand to each other is really expressed in this word. It is an understood thing that they are bound to render friendly services to each other. The whole of the fortune with which the bride has been endowed may go, if her husband survives her, to his family; and all his money may eventually enrich her if she outlives him. It is also well understood that, should commercial or other disasters overtake the newly-wedded couple

both families are to assist them. The principle of each family group maintaining its unfortunate members, and not throwing them on the State, is even more distinctly recognized in French custom than the Code. This is why marriages celebrated in England between young Frenchmen and English girls are frowned upon by the relations of the former, and every advantage is taken which the law gives to set them aside. Zola's pictures of *bourgeois* life are, in the main, false. They are more applicable to the aristocratic than to the middle class.

The Solitude of Servants.—Say you are a well-to-do tradesman or mechanic, you can afford to employ a servant to make life easier for your wife. Well, that servant lives alone. Your wife and yourself discourage "followers." You don't like her to have too much company of either sex in the kitchen. Your wife cannot associate with her. The kitchen is her sitting-room; the smallest and most remote room in the house is her bedroom. From six A.M. until nine P.M., or earlier and later, may be, are her hours of work. In all that time she speaks when she is spoken to, and she is spoken to when there are orders for her, just as convicts are allowed to speak in a penitentiary. Well, now, the lonely creature in the kitchen is a woman. Do you wonder she wants to go to the jolly butcher and the grocer's boy for a little gossip? Do you wonder that she flirts with the policeman? Do you wonder that when she goes to the ball she stays until some time the next day? She sits down three times a day and eats her meals in solitude. So utterly alone that she can hear herself swallow. I wonder that she doesn't go mad. The man who works at the lowest occupation has an easier time than that. The man who cleanses the street has company of his own class. He eats his dinner with his fellow-labourers. The rag-picker meets rival rag-pickers every day. I don't wonder the house-servant stipulates for company and evenings out.



"FOR YOUR OWN SAKE," SAID MR. HILL, GRAVELY, "I PRAY YOU WILL BE RECONCILED TO YOUR HUSBAND."

OVALETTE:

IRENE'S MISTAKE.

CHAPTER L

GUARDIAN AND WARD.

My name was Irene. I never quite knew why I had received the beautiful title, which means "Child of Peace," but I always fancied it must have been given me at my mother's wish—that fair young mother who died so soon after I was born, and whose memory even now is so precious to her husband that he cannot bear to speak of her to me, her only child.

I am eighteen now, grown up and mistress of Fortescue Grange; but then as I have been mistress there ever since I could speak plain I don't know that my eighteen years have brought me much increased importance. There is no society in the neighbourhood—none at all. The rector and the doctor are both married men; but the former's wife has too much to do among the poor to think about those in her own sphere—and Mrs. Gibson is always occupied in her nursery, and so it comes about that my father and I lead a life as solitary as if we dwelt in a desert place. I ride my pony for miles round our pretty picturesque village. Papa shuts himself up in the library, no one calls on us, we never have any letters; and yet shut off though we may be from kith-and-kin—from friends, festivities, and amusements—I am as about as happy as it is possible for a child to be. And so the years pass on until the bright July day dawns which sees the eighteenth anniversary of my birth. "Eighteen," says my father, half dreamily, as I come down to breakfast and ask for his good wishes. "Oh! my darling, I wish I could have kept you a child always."

"But that is quite impossible," I return, with all the importance of my age, "and, papa, I thought you would like me to be growing up. I fancied, somehow, that perhaps when I was a woman you would miss mamma less."

The last words come nervously, almost tearfully. It is the first time I have ever spoken my mother's name in my father's presence, and I am a little anxious as to its effect upon him.

He shivered violently, as though the July sun were not pouring into the room. Then he draws me closer to himself, and plants a tender kiss upon my brow.

"Am I like her?" I venture to whisper.

"You are her image."

"Did you love her very much? Where did she die? Why do you never mention her? Papa, you can't think how much I have longed to hear about her."

He sighs heavily.

"She was very beautiful, my darling, and I loved her as my own life. Her loss blighted my whole existence. Do not ask any more, Irene; that is all you can ever know of your mother."

It seems little and meagre enough, but I dare not inquire further, much as I long to hear about the fair young mother on whose short life my thoughts were always busy. She had probably died away from Cleve, for among the many tablets in our church telling of the virtues of departed Fortescues there was not one to the memory of Beatrice Helen.

"Papa," I say, suddenly, "haven't we any relations? It seems so strange that in all the world we have no one of our name."

"We have relations. A distant cousin of mine will some day be master here. I have never sought acquaintance with him, for I can not feel kindly to a man whom by a quibble of law robs my darling of her heritage. I always meant to tell you the truth to-day, Irene. The Grange and its revenues can never be yours. The moment the breath is out of my body Adrian Fortescue, the next male heir, will be master here, and my little girl a homeless wanderer."

My tears fell thick and fast, not for the loss of the Grange, though I loved it dearly, but

because I could not bear to think of a time when I must part from my father. It seemed to me when that day came I should be too miserable even to covet Walter Fortescue's inheritance.

"I have saddened you," said my father, quietly. "Child, what shall we do that you may pass a happy birthday? Choose for yourself, Irene."

And I chose. Alas! I made a choice which brought bitter sorrow on myself, and for a while did fair to blight my whole life.

"Let us ride to Cleve Woods. Ward can put up a basket of lunch, one of the maids can take it in the spring-cart, and we will have a delightful picnic all to ourselves."

And we had. Through all the dark trials which followed each other so quickly the memory of that July day stands out like a bright shining star.

I never knew my father so cheerful, I never heard him talk so hopefully. He told me then, in speaking of my birthday, that he had quite forgiven me for depriving him of an heir—that no son could have been so dear to him as his little motherless daughter.

We rode home in the cool of the evening, and as we passed Cleve Manor—the grandest house in our neighbourhood—we were surprised to see it ablaze with lights; through every window they gleamed and flickered. We could see the reflection of servant's figures, as they moved quickly to and fro. What could it all mean? Ever since I could recollect the Manor had been closely shut up, and no one ever spoke before me of its absent master; in fact, so strenuously did they avoid the subject, that I had come to the conclusion Lord Cleve may be mad or afflicted with some other dire calamity, which made it impossible to talk of him.

Now, when I saw the changes at the Manor, where I noticed the bustle of preparation, I knew by instinct that the mystery was soon to be solved—Lord Cleve was coming home.

We seldom rode in this direction, papa did

not care for it; he usually passed the Manor without even a glance. To-night the change in its aspect struck him. He reined his horse and asked a young man, who stood at the gate unloading a van, whether Lord Cleve were returning.

The youth was a perfect stranger. I thought how strange it was of papa to ask him when anyone in the village would have known better.

"He is here now, sir," said the youth, respectfully. "My lord arrived late last night."

"Alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then Lady Cleve remains alone?"

The stranger looked a little puzzled.

"There is no Lady Cleve, sir," he said, simply; "my lord is not a married man."

"Ah!"

The ejaculation was almost a groan. We rode on quickly, and my father never spoke another word until we reached home. It was getting very late then, and I ran upstairs to my own room alone.

Papa had said that my mother was beautiful, and that I was her image; but I could not quite reconcile these statements, for in my mind I was plain to a degree. I was very small and slight, so that many people took me for a child. I had masses of wavy brown hair, which no persuasions would keep smooth; large grey-blue eyes, and a soft, creamy skin, which was seldom relieved by any colour. I put on a white muslin hurriedly, my mind smoothing my hair and fastening my broad blue sash. Then I ran lightly downstairs—the refrain of an old ballad on my lips. Alas! alas! how many days fled by before I felt in the mood to sing again! My father was not in the drawing-room—a strange alarm seized on me.

"Where is papa?"

"The master's in the study, miss," replied our old man-servant; "he is resting from his ride. I wouldn't go to disturb him, Miss Irene!"

But nothing would have kept me from him. I started up at once, went downstairs, and pushed open the library door, which stood ajar.

Never to my life's-end shall I forget what I saw. My father was stretched on the sofa, pale and motionless. Mrs. Ward, our house-keeper bent over him with sal volatile, strong salts, and other restoratives. She looked up quickly when she saw me.

"What is it?" I gasped.

"Sir Edward is not quite well."

"He looks like death," I murmured, my teeth chattering so that I could hardly speak. "Oh! Ward, tell me is it really that! Oh! I don't keep me in suspense! I can bear anything but that! With one hand the old house-keeper forced me into a chair, with the other she administered a glass of wine.

"Bless me! Miss Irene, you shouldn't take such fancies into your head. Dead, indeed! why it's nothing more than a fainting fit."

"But papa never does faint, Ward?"

"I've never seen him like this but once before," she replied, "that's true enough; but I've sent for the doctor, and no doubt he'll know what to do."

Dr. Gibson entered as she finished speaking. He was a genial, kindly man, not far from fifty, a friend to everyone, but an inveterate home-stayer, for he was devoted to his wife—a sweet-faced woman, more than ten years his junior, who had first come to Cleve when I was a baby.

The doctor bent over my father for a few seconds; then he turned away with a heavy sigh; he never attempted to restore him to consciousness—never once.

"How did the attack come on?"

Ward told him of our excursion, and how the master came home tired and had gone straight to the library without even dressing for dinner.

"He looked strange and scared Giles said," continued the old house-keeper; "and something made me come up to see if I could do anything, but he has never moved since or spoken, not even to Miss Irene."

The doctor turned to me.

"You were out with your father; did he seem in his usual spirits?"

"Oh, yes; we had a delightful day."

"And nothing occurred to trouble him?"

"Nothing; at least, he seemed put out when we passed Cleve Manor to see the preparations. He stayed and talked some time to a young man there; I had almost forgotten him."

"A young man! You don't mean Lord Cleve?"

"Oh, no; a servant. He told papa that Lord Cleve had come home alone, there was no Lady Cleve. Then papa turned round and walked home; he never spoke another word, but I could see he was vexed."

I saw Ward look at the doctor in speechless amazement.

"That explains it all!"

I wondered what it explained, and I thought them both strongly indignant of my father. Why had Ward so plainly passed him off? Why did Dr. Gibson not administer restoratives? I thought I would recall their neglect to their minds, and so, kneeling down, I took up one of the stiff, cold hands, and began shaking it in my warm one.

Ward's eyes filled with tears. Dr. Gibson put one hand gently on my shoulder.

"Gertie, my dear."

"But I cannot make him speak to me."

I shall never forget the pity shining in the doctor's eyes as he said, tenderly—

"Your father will never speak to you again, Irene, my poor child; hear it as bravely as you can, Sir Edward's troubles are ended."

"He had no troubles!" I cried, defiantly; "and oh! he would never leave me!"

"Not willingly," said the doctor, kindly; "but a higher hand than ours has beckoned him away."

"Not dead!" I murmured. "Oh! not that!"

"Yes, just that, poor child! It is disease of the heart, Irene. Let it comfort you to know that he suffered very little pain, and that he is now free from a very bitter sorrow, which for years blighted his life."

But I could not realize my misfortune, I was as one stunned by a sudden blow. Dr. Gibson understood, and taking me up in his strong arms, he carried me to my own room, stood over me while I drank a cordial he had hastily prepared, and then, with a few kind words of sympathy, he went his way, leaving Ward to take care of her nursing.

I may live to be quite an old woman, but I shall never forget the horrors of that awakening. I slept for more than twelve hours under the influence of the draught, and when, at last, I opened my eyes, I saw Ward standing at my bed-side with a little tray of coffee. One look into the old woman's face and I remembered everything; I burst into a fit of bitter weeping. They said, afterwards, those tears saved my life.

When I grew calmer, and had swallowed the coffee, Ward helped me to dress. There was no black frock in my wardrobe, but the old house-keeper tied a black sash round my waist, and fastened my hair with a ribbon of the same sombre hue.

"Ward," I whispered, when she had finished, struck by the recollection of yesterday's conversation; "do you know that I shall have to go away from here? Papa told me the Grange could never be my home if he left me."

"It's true enough, Miss Irene; but don't go to fret about it, dear; maybe you'll miss your poor papa less in a strange place."

I shook my head; the idea that change of scene could lessen my grief seemed almost an indignity. I wondered a little dimly where I should go, and then they came to tell me Dr. Gibson wanted to see me in the drawing-room.

He was not alone, he had brought his wife—that sweet, gentle woman who so seldom left her nursery—and she took me into her arms and kissed me, as though she had known me intimately instead of only having spoken to me very formally half-a-dozen times in her life.

"I want you to come home with me," she said, "dear Miss Fortescue. Indeed, you must not stay here."

I looked into her face and loved her, but I was not shaken in my resolution.

"I must stay here!" I cried, passionately. "Don't you know that very soon they will take him away from me altogether? I must see him while I can."

I know her tears were falling.

"You must not be alone," she said, firmly. "If you will not come to us, will you let me come to you?"

"But the children?" I gasped. "You could never be spared. But oh! how I should like it!"

"I think I can manage it. My sister is here, and she can take my place. I cannot leave you alone until your guardian comes."

"My guardian?"

"I have written to him at once," said the Doctor, speaking for the first time. "When your poor father first suspected the disease from which he died he wrote to an old friend of his—a tried and trusted comrade—and asked him to take care of you in the event of his own death. He left me this gentleman's address, and I quite expect him here very soon."

"And I shall belong to him?"

"For the next three years. From the terms in which your father spoke of him, I am sure he will do his best for your interests. I would gladly have accepted the charge myself, but I find we could not offer you the advantages Lord Alwyn would procure for his ward."

Mrs. Gibson and I grew intimate when her husband left us; she was barely thirty-seven, and, in spite of limited means and household cares, she looked much younger; she petted and comforted me as only a mother can, and when I marvelled at her kindness and said how good it was of her to show such goodness to a stranger, she said she could never look on me as that."

"But you kept away all these years. I used to see your face in church and think how I would like to know you."

She sighed.

"When I first came to Cleve, Irene—if I may call you so—your mother was my dearest friend; the kindness, the tenderness she showed me I could never explain to you. If our home is happier than many, if I have never had a wish beyond it, I think it owe it to the patience with which she corrected my girlish errors in the first months of my married life. When the news of her—my friend's voice hesitated, doubtless from grief—"loss reached us, I begged Sir Edward to let you come to me, you were only two years older than my eldest little girl—the one I have had to give back to Heaven—but he refused. I think anyone who recalled his wife gave him pain, and as I knew he could not see me without thinking of the days when I had been almost a sister to Lady Fortescue, I ceased my visits to the Grange. I have never been here since I was with her until to-day."

"She died abroad, didn't she?" I asked sadly.

"Do you know, Mrs. Gibson, I have not the slightest memorial of her. Papa would never speak of her."

"You have her name," said my new friend, gently. "You were christened Beatrice Irene."

Mrs. Gibson stayed with me till after the funeral; she would not leave me until my guardian had arrived. Day by day we expected Lord Alwyn, but each passed without bringing him. I grew indignant; I was so used to be made much of, I could not understand his neglect.

"I wish you would take me home with you," I said sadly to Mrs. Gibson. "I daresay this Lord Alwyn is some gouty old man, who will be very unkind to me."

She smiled.

"It is your duty to go with him, Irene, since from all the world your father chose him as your protector; but I hope he will be here soon. Your cousin Adrian talks of coming with his family to the Grange next week, and it would

be very painful to you to see strangers in your home."

"It would kill me!"

"This is only Monday," she said, soothingly. "I think the Earl is sure to be here to-night."

"He ought to have come before."

"He may have been travelling on the Continent, and the doctor's telegram been following him from place to place. You know, Irene, it is only five days since it was despatched."

Aye, this is Monday, it is not yet a week since my wretched birthday; and oh! what has happened in this week! I seem suddenly to have grown old when I think of it; for those days have robbed me of home and father, and have made me an orphan alone in the world. That very afternoon my darling had been borne to the tomb of his titled ancestry, and already his successor was waiting to claim my home as his own. I had refused to see Sir Adrian, but I was surprised how readily my friends and he himself had agreed to my decision. I thought the head of my family singularly remiss in attention to his kinswoman—he had never even troubled himself to ask what would become of her!

And now the grand funeral was over, the blinds were up again, the library was no longer sadly tenanted by the remains of its late master, but a day life must begin again. Tomorrow Mrs. Gibson would return to her family, and I must go with her if Lord Alwyn did not trouble himself to claim the charge left him by his dear dead friend.

I had put on my mourning attire and felt more childlike and smaller than ever in the heavy crêpe-trimmed dress. Mrs. Gibson had left the room in search of a book, and I was resting listlessly on the sofa, when I heard the door open. I never even turned my head, I felt quite sure it was my friend returning; but the footstep was firmer, bolder, and I started up to find myself face to face with a tall, soldierly man, with a grave, serious face, and noble bearing. He gave one look at me, and then a strange change came to his expression.

"Beatrice!" he murmured, as one lost in a dream; then rapidly recovering himself, he held out his hand. "I told the servants I would introduce myself to you. Are you my ward, Irene Fortescue?"

"My name is Irene Beatrice," I returned, coldly, bent on snubbing him. "But I don't want to be your ward at all, thank you, Lord Alwyn."

"I am afraid you must!" he said, simply. "But, indeed, you shall not find me a hard guardian. I will do what heart and life can to make you happy!"

I shook my head.

"I would much rather stay here."

"But this house is Sir Adrian's."

"Well," I retorted, "I could have a little house in the village, and Maud and one of the maids to look after me. I should be much happier than with you!"

"You seem to hate me without seeing me!"

"Well you have done your best to make me!"

"I!" and his face grew grave. "Why, I never heard of your father's death until two days ago in Germany, and I have travelled night and day since in the vain hope to reach here in time."

I relented.

"Then you did come as soon as you could?"

"The very instant."

"I thought perhaps you didn't want me, and so stayed away until they had done something with me that you might not have to see after me!"

He drew his chair closer to mine and took my hand in his strong clasp.

"When your father asked me to be your guardian I accepted the task gladly, Irene. He was the dearest friend I ever had. I knew him from my boyhood!"

"He looked a great deal older than you."

"He was ten years older. We were like brothers once."

"And did you know my mother? Was she like a sister to you once, Lord Alwyn?"

"I knew her very well—well enough to be struck by your resemblance to her. When I came in just now I could have thought Beatrice Montague stood before me as I saw her last."

"Then I am like what you expected?"

"Hardly. Your father spoke of a little girl!"

"Well, I am little enough. Lord Alwyn, will you be very kind to me?"

He promised gravely, and then Mrs. Gibson came in, and he talked chiefly to her, though I could see his eyes wandering to my face more than once.

It seemed to me that now he had come the Earl hardly knew what to do with me. He had expected a child who could be sent to school. He was an unmarried man; his mother and sister lived at Alwyn Castle, but he never once spoke of sending me to them.

"Irene is turned eighteen," Mrs. Gibson said, quietly. "She is too old for a school-girl!"

"Yes. I can't think how I made the mistake. I ought to have known it was almost fourteen years since Sir Edward lost his wife, but I fancied my ward was a baby then."

My kind friend had to leave me the next day; but thinking I should be troubled if forced to sustain a *meilleure vie* with the Earl, she sent her sister to keep me company. It was kindly meant, but a great mistake. Mrs. Gibson had petted me tenderly. Miss Grant, an old-young lady of thirty-four, considered me a spoilt child, who deserved a scolding for taking up so much of her sister's valuable time.

Lord Alwyn was out almost all day, so the spinster's companionship was hardly needed, and the more she tortured me—imagine the effect of coarse calico violently torn upon a person of very delicate nerves—and you will have a good idea of what Miss Grant's conversation was to me.

"Is Sir Adrian married?" she asked, at last, after lunch, when several topics had been started and fallen through chiefly by my fault.

"I don't know."

"It would have been a good thing for you if he had a wife and young family!"

"Why?"

"You might have remained on here."

"I don't want to. This place couldn't be home to me without papa. But I don't see what difference the wife and young family would have made to me in my case."

"You might have taught the children."

"Taught! I! Why, Miss Grant, no child would obey me. Children love me for a play-fellow, but anything more serious would never do!"

"But I suppose you will have to be a governess some day!" she said, tartly.

"I don't see why. Plenty of girls are left without relations; but they don't take to teaching unless they are poor."

A spiteful look came to her thin, sallow face.

"And that is precisely your case. Your father never saved a penny for you. When his debts are paid you will have about ten pounds to bless yourself with; so, unless you take to teaching, I really don't see what you are to do, unless, of course, you like to live on Lord Alwyn's charity all your days—if he'll let you."

I never knew; I was too innocent in the ways of the world to think of such a thing. I never guessed that Barbara Grant had come to the Grange not to see me but the Earl, and being disappointed in her ambition, she was venting her petulance on me. I started up furiously at the insult I had received.

"I don't believe it!"

"It's true enough; only my sister and her husband are so idiotically soft-hearted, they won't tell you. I daresay Lord Alwyn has

gone out to-day to think the matter quietly over. Of course, though he's your guardian, he can't be expected to keep you. You've no earthly claim on him."

My tormentor stopped, and I roused myself to answer her calmly though the iron had entered into my soul.

"The pony carriage is coming round, Miss Grant. I will not trespass on your kindness any longer. Please thank your sister very much for sparing you to me."

My pride had kept me up; my voice was quite firm and clear; I never gave way until my guest had departed. Then, when I had seen the pony carriage bear her away, my courage failed me, and I threw myself into a low lounging chair, and wept as though my heart would break.

I could not think or ponder. I was as one stricken to the earth with shame and mortification. I came of an intensely proud family, and I had just learned that I was a beggar.

At last my grief spent itself a little. Its very violence exhausted me; my heavy eyes closed, and the only comfort left me came—I fell asleep.

When I opened my eyes the scene seemed changed, the curtains were drawn, and the soft rays of a moderator lamp shed their brightness around.

At first I thought I was alone, but as I moved uneasily someone came forward.

"Irene!"

It was my guardian. He took my hand gently in his, but at the remembrance of Miss Grant's cruel words I shrank away. I buried my face in my hands, and said reproachfully,—

"If I were only dead!"

My hands were taken down and clasped in a firm grasp. Lord Alwyn bent on one knee to bring his face on a level with my own, and said gravely,

"Do you know it is very wrong to say that?"

"Perhaps; but oh, Lord Alwyn, if you only knew how wretched I am!"

"Your father is better off," he said, kindly. "Believe me, Irene, his life was so full of suffering, death must have come as a release!"

"But I miss him so! And that is not all. You don't understand."

"You don't mean that you have any other trouble?"

He released my hand, and somehow his voice seemed changed.

"Of course I have."

"I will not force your confidence; but remember, Irene, your father left you to my care."

"You can't do anything. Of course it is very hard on you too, but oh, I never thought of it—never!"

"My dear child, you are talking riddles."

"Well, that is what she said. She said you had gone out to try and think of a way of escape."

"What can you mean?"

"I am a beggar!"

His face cleared.

"You are nothing of the kind."

"Miss Grant said I ought to go out as a governess."

"I shall not let you."

"She said I hadn't any money, and that I was an awful burden to you, and should be always unless I got something to do."

Reginald Bertram, Earl of Alwyn, muttered something about Miss Grant not very complimentary to that spinster; then he took my hand in his and stroked it gently.

"And is that all, Irene?"

"I think it's quite enough."

"Nonsense! You are my ward, and I have more money than I know what to do with. I could find you a dozen homes as far as expense went. That is not the difficulty. I am a little troubled, I confess, to find anywhere where I feel sure you will be happy; but even if you

were twenty times an heiress my task would be no easier."

"But then I shall be just what she said—a burden, living on your charity."

"You are under my control, you can't help yourself!"

"I have no claim on you. Your relations might say just the same as Miss Grant."

He looked into my eyes, and there was a new strange light in his own.

"Irene, will you let me give you a claim on me—the strongest any woman can have?"

I did not understand in the very least. He took both my hands and continued his eager gaze.

"Be my wife, Irene, and then who can say a word to make you unhappy?"

But I was silent—absolutely silent; he had taken my breath away. I was eighteen, but I had never thought of love or marriage; the subject had never even been mentioned before me. I had no girl friends; I read no novels. No convent nun could have been more amazed at receiving a proposal than I was at my guardian's.

"Have I frightened you?" he asked, gently, and yet, I could see, putting a strong restraint on his feelings. "Do you think the twenty-two years between us too great a difference? My dear one, unions have been happier with even a greater."

"It is not that!" I gasped; "but I never thought of such a thing. I never meant to be married at all—and you only saw me yesterday!"

"Is there anyone else, Irene?"

"What do you mean?"

"Is there anyone you prefer to me—any younger man, I mean?"

I shook my head.

"I never saw a young man in my life to speak to, Lord Alwyn—never once; but I don't want to be married, and you only saw me yesterday, so you can't mind."

"I do mind!" he said, in a kind of choked voice. "Child, from the moment I saw your face I resolved that, Heaven willing, you should be my wife. I had not meant to tell you so soon; I wanted to break it more gradually to you, to try to win your heart, but this wicked gossip has left me no alternative. Darling, be my wife! and I swear to you that you shall be as loved and honoured as ever was a Countess Alwyn. I will take what care of you heart and life can, Irene, if you will only let me try!"

I feel inclined to let him; after thinking of oneself as a burden for a few hours it is very nice to be so much wanted. There is no mistaking the eagerness of the Earl's voice. I know nothing of love, and yet I am certain he loves me, but yet I hesitate.

"I always thought when people married they loved each other?" I suggest, dubiously.

"I love you, and I do not despair of winning your heart in time if only you will marry me!"

I sigh.

"But it is taking all and giving nothing!" I suggest again.

I do not like this, for I am not ungenerous.

"It is giving me the only thing I covet—yourself!" he rejoins, gravely. "Irene, I am content, aye! and glad to take you, knowing you do not love me if only you are sure you love no one else?"

"No one in the world!"

"Then, my darling, let me be happy!"

And though marvelling much at his strange idea of felicity I yield the point, and at nine I go to bed that night the Earl's affianced wife.

CHAPTER II.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

I SLEPT long and soundly after the excitement of the day before, and when I wake the August sunshine is pouring into my room, and my dear Mrs. Gibson is standing by my bedside.

One look into her face, and I know she has heard my destiny—a second, and I am sure,

She does not even guess the share her sister has had in bringing it about.

"Well!" she says, smiling; "and so you have given yourself away. Was it love at first sight, Irene?"

"He says so!" I return, awkwardly. "Do you think it is very wrong of me?"

"I think it quite right. I believe it was your father's dearest wish; and I know your mother esteemed Lord Alwyn very highly."

And as I am dressing she tells me that the Earl has gone to London to make preparations; he will be back on Thursday with a special license, and then, in the very room where I saw him first, I am to be converted into his countess.

"It is best so," remarks my kind mentor, when I complain of the suddenness of this arrangement: "the Earl is anxious to begin his care of you at once—and really, Irene, there is nothing to be gained by waiting."

Well, Thursday came at last and brought my lover. I was standing in my own room almost dressed when Mrs. Ward entered, bearing a bridal bouquet.

"From the Earl, my dear young lady!"

They had made me put off my mourning for this one day. I wore a summer dress of white muslin, trimmed with lace, and Mrs. Gibson herself had journeyed to the nearest town to choose the orange-blossoms for my wreath. With her own hands she fastened it on my soft, waving hair, and then she led me downstairs to the room where my wedding was to be performed.

As one in a dream I saw that Dr. Gibson was waiting to give me away; that the old rector was there in his white surplice, and our servants were gathered in a little crowd near the door. I trembled so that I could hardly walk, and the Earl seeing this turned and gave me his arm.

He looked his best to-day; if he had been going to marry the richest heiress in England instead of a penniless girl, who did not love him, he could not have seemed in better spirits. His responses were clear and distinct—mine hardly audible. I realized nothing quite, until I saw a gold ring on my finger, and the kind doctor took my hand and addressed me as Lady Alwyn.

Giles brought in cake and wine on a great silver salver, but I could not eat anything, so Mrs. Gibson took me upstairs.

"You must dress quickly, dear; the carriage is waiting to take you to the station."

And it only dawned on me then that I was going away, that never—never more could Fortescue Grange be my own home again. I said nothing, words would not come; I let her dress me as though I were a lay figure, and take me back to my husband.

"Are you ready, Irene?"

"Perfectly."

I clung to my mother's friend as I bade her good-bye, and the tears stood in her eyes as she kissed me. Another minute and I was in the brougham at the Earl's side; my married life had begun.

I leant back in my corner; I was thoroughly tired, and I should have been quite willing to sleep through that ten-mile drive. But my husband stretched out his hand, and drew mine into his clasp, saying fondly, "My own at last." As I had really married him three days after our first meeting, I thought he need not have added those last words.

"Where are we going?" I asked, suddenly.

"Abroad. I am quite sure you want a change. I am going to take you to Germany, and then, later on, I shall show you Paris."

"Where do you live, Lord Alwyn?"

He stared. So I repeated,—

"Haven't you got a home?"

"I have two or three, Irene. I suppose my real home is Alwyn Castle. My mother and Caree live there, but I generally stay in London."

"Don't you like the Castle?"

"I am very fond of it, but it has had painful associations for me. I will take you there

some day, Irene, and your sweet presence will banish them for ever."

"Have you told your mother?"

"Told her what?"

"About me."

"Yes; I wrote to her on Tuesday night, directly you had promised I should be happy."

"And what did she say?"

But the Earl did not seem to hear the question; he began to tell me of the beauties of Germany, and I was listening with a fair amount of interest when we passed the gates of Cleve Manor.

"I shall always hate that house!" I said, abruptly.

"Why?" and there was a stern look on my husband's face. "What has anyone dared to tell you about Cleve and its master?"

I told him how it was always connected in my mind with my father's death and why. His frown relaxed as he listened, and I took courage.

"Are you vexed? Do you know, you looked quite fierce for a minute!"

"Did I?"

"Yes; you frightened me."

For all answer he put his arm around me and drew me to himself—a proceeding I much objected to. I was not fond of any demonstration of affection.

"Please, don't," I said, shortly.

"Why not?" sharply, the obnoxious arm still in its position.

I did not answer; I could think of no reason telling enough.

"What a cold little creature you are!" he said, reproachfully. "My darling, don't you know you are my wife now, and I have a right to caress you?"

"But if I don't like it?"

He sighed so heavily that I relented, the arm kept its place, and we reached the station without any more difficulties.

We crossed that night to Calais, and the next day we went on to Cologne as fast as train could take us; from there we drove to a charming little village on the banks of the Rhine, where the Earl intended us to pass our honeymoon; and where he forthwith engaged the prettiest little house I had ever seen.

Then began a time which seemed the longest I had ever spent—no days in all my life had passed so slowly as did the first of my married life.

I had nothing to complain of—no wish ungratified; horses and carriages to take me to every interesting spot in a neighbourhood noted for its beauty, a husband who had no other thought but to please me—and yet I was not happy.

The Earl never reproached me for my indifference and my listless, spiritless ways. He knew what a blow my father's death had been to me, and he bore my caprices with the utmost patience. And so the late summer and early autumn faded away till I had grown quite used to seeing a gold ring upon my left hand, and hearing my maid address me as "my lady."

"Irene!"

We were at breakfast one bright October morning, and my husband was busy with his letters. He had a great many from England, and I knew by instinct some came from his mother, but he never showed them to me—he never once alluded to his family in my hearing.

"The days are getting short and cold," he said, as I looked up; "don't you think we had better go to Paris next week?"

But my heart cried out for England. It was more than two months since I had left the Grange, and I had a kind of passionate homesickness on me.

"I had rather go home."

"You can't, dear," he said, gravely. "Sir Adrian Fortescue has taken possession of the Grange, you know."

"Yes; but couldn't we go to England?"

"You would be very dull. I think we had better spend the winter in Paris, then we can go to London for the season. I shall be very

proud of my wife when she is presented at Court—you will be the youngest countess in England, dear."

"Shall I really, Lord Alwyn?"

"Irene, are you always going to call me by my title? Am I never to hear my name from my wife's lips?"

"I am very sorry. But I forget what it is. He looked deeply hurt."

"Don't you remember our wedding-day?"

"I remember perfectly!"

"You heard my name then—Reginald!"

"Reginald!" I repeated, musing. "I like it very much, but I don't think I can ever see it—it sounds much too familiar."

He laughed in spite of his vexation.

"I wish it, Irene," he repeated, slowly.

"Well, I'll try and remember it, Reginald. When are we going to Paris?"

We went to Paris next week, and in spite of my deep mourning I found society very willing to do honour to the Countess of Alwyn.

I went to a great many parties. The English residents in the gay French capital received us with open arms, and after a while I took very kindly to the new life of gaiety and excitement till I became so much absorbed in visiting that I never noticed the little cloud arising in my domestic horizon.

Looking back I could never quite tell when Reginald tired of me. Only after we had been two months in Paris I awoke to the fact that my husband, who in Germany had seemed unable to leave me for an hour, now gave me as little of his time as he possibly could without exciting remark.

If we were dining out he sat beside me in the carriage which conveyed us to our hosts; did we have friends in our own elegant apartments he stood near me while I received them, and that was all. When I came down in the morning I found him gone out for the day.

Dresses, jewels, flowers, ornaments, everything that money could procure, he lavished on me freely; but he never gave me his society—the caresses I had once repulsed were now never offered me, sometimes for days together he hardly touched my hand.

I woke up to this bitter truth. I learned that Reginald no longer loved me very early in the new year, and almost at the same time I discovered something else—the love he had once craved was his!

My slumbering heart had awoke, and it was all my husband's. A mist seemed to fall from my eyes, and I saw him as he was—noble, generous, and true.

Oh, how I longed to tell him that the lesson he had once desired to teach me was learned! Oh, how I hungered for the caresses I had once despised! My heart ached for one of the old smiles, one of the old loving embraces.

I could not go to him and tell him I loved him, my pride held me back. He had changed, he cared for me no longer; how could I go and tell him I had learned to care for him more than all the world?

In my cruel anxiety that he should not guess my secret I acted the part of an indifferent wife too carefully. I said cold, bitter things just to guard my secret.

This was February, we were quite a fashionable couple now. For days together I never saw my husband except in the presence of strangers. The man who had told me I was the only thing he coveted in the world now seemed quite careless whether he saw my face or not—the love he had said would last our lives had cooled before we had been married six months. And I was so young, not nineteen yet. I might live fifty years or more, and must they all be spent like this, at my darling's side and yet less to him than a stranger—so near and yet so far?

Things were like this when Reginald came in one morning unexpectedly and found me toying with a late breakfast. He looked at me closely, and then I remembered that the tears were yet wet upon my cheeks. I had never thought he would come in or I would not have left their traces on my face.

"Are you not well?" he asked, kindly, but

with not one touch of the old tenderness in his tone.

"Perfectly well, thank you, Lord Alwyn!" I never called him anything else and he had ceased to notice the omission, but in my heart I always thought of him as Reginald, my king, my love, my darling. I, even in the midst of all my misery, derived some comfort from the thought that while I lived no other woman could be aught to him; he might not love me, but at least I bore his name—I was his wife.

"You have been crying."

I never attempted to deny it.

"I am tired!"

"Poor child," he said, lightly; "tired of pleasure. I don't think you do much else to fatigued you, Irene."

The words were spoken in all simplicity, but I took them as a reprimand.

"I don't seek pleasure more than other people," I said, defiantly; "and if I do, whose fault is it?"

I meant that it was his, because, instead of granting my wish and letting me return to England, he had brought me here and launched me into the vortex of the gay French capital. But he misunderstood me; he thought I meant that, forced into a loveless marriage, I had no other distraction than amusement.

"Don't say that!" he cried, bitterly. "It is true enough, I know; but it makes me wretched to hear you say it, Irene, when I think of the change six months have wrought in you. I wish from the bottom of my heart that I could set you free!"

"I am not changed!"

"Not changed! The pure-eyed innocent child has blossomed into a weary disappointed woman of the world. Do you think I am blind, that I cannot see how much you are altered?"

"I am sorry you are disappointed in your bargain," I said, bitterly. "I always told you how it would be—it is as bad for me as for you."

He sighed, a weary look came upon his noble brow.

"I did not come to reproach you with our mutual misery," he said, sadly, "but to tell you I have to go to England on business. You will not miss me much, as things are, and I hope to return in a week or ten days."

I longed to throw myself at his feet and implore him to take me with him, but pride held me back.

"When do you start?"

"To-night. I leave here in an hour, as I have some business to transact at the club."

"Oh, very well!"

"In ten days at the latest I shall be back. Take care of yourself, Irene. Have you money enough to last you until I return?"

"I have plenty."

"Remember," he said, wistfully, "it is my wish that you should deny yourself nothing you fancy. I may not be able to make you happy, Irene, but I will at least gratify your every wish."

"Do you mean to insinuate that I married you for money?" I cried, hotly.

"I never said so."

"Well, I wish I hadn't done it!" I cried, passionately, and then I rushed from the room, quite forgetting in my anger that I was leaving Reginald to think the very thing, the bare suggestion of which had so angered me.

I did not see him again, but though my heart ached badly I determined I would not wear the willow; so in the evening I made a ravishing toilette and set off for Mrs. Girton's. She was one of my favourite acquaintances, and though to see her husband's devotion always gave me a sharp pain when I contrasted her married lot with mine, I really liked her very much.

She saw at once that something was the matter, but with rare tact she asked no questions, only she said to me with a smile, —

"I have a guest coming who has specially craved an introduction to you, dear."

"Who is it?" listlessly.

"Your remember that noble-looking old

man whom you have so often noticed watching you?"

"Yes."

"Well, he turns out to be an English nobleman with a princely estate, and, what is more, a romantic history. A dozen years ago he was in love with someone he couldn't marry, and her death drove him wild. His hair charged to white in one night; and while all England was remembering him as the fastest man about town he was going about in disguise, doing good and leading the life of a hermit."

I felt interested in spite of my own troubles.

"Who told you all this?"

"Bertie, to be sure. But the strangest part is to come. When the old gentleman asked me for an introduction to you he said you were the daughter of an old friend."

"What is his name?"

"St. George—at least that is his *nom de voyage*. They say he will never resume his title."

Mr. St. George arrived in due course, and took me into dinner. In spite of his silvery hair I felt he was not so old as my friend thought—fifty, probably, at the most. He talked pleasantly and talked well. Before we left the table he had requested the pleasure of calling on me at my apartments, and I had consented. I even looked forward to his coming with something more akin to interest than I had felt in any of my fellow-creatures for many a long day.

"It is very kind of you to favour an old man's whim," he said, gently, when we had shaken hands. "Lady Alwyn, do you know ever since I heard of your father's death it has been my greatest wish to meet you?"

"I think you told Miss Girton you were my father's friend."

"We were near neighbours and intimates. I was young and rash in those days, but, Lady Alwyn, I never meant to injure Sir Edward Fortescue, as Heaven is my witness, never once. He had a beautiful, idolized wife, whom I, in common with all who knew her, admired; but I swear to you, her daughter, I never spoke a word to her the whole world might not have overheard."

I looked up at him with a troubled face.

"You have said too little or too much," I answered.

"It is my wish to tell you all. The explanation I could not give your father I desire to offer to his child. There is no word in it you need blush to hear. If their lives were blighted, at least there is no sin in the story which ruined them."

"Your father married your mother after a month's acquaintance, and she was then the plighted wife of one of his dearest friends. Unfortunately, that friend was poor. Many would have thought mercenary motives influenced the young bride, but it was nothing of the kind. She had been brought up with her *fiancée* from childhood—they were cousins, and she mistook their brotherly and sisterly affection for something stronger. She gave to your father the one love of her life, and she never altered."

"And he loved her—her loss blighted his life!"

"Aye, but it was a jealous love. He could never forget she had forsaken another man from love of him. He sometimes in his jealousy doubted whether his wealth and title had counted for nothing in his triumph. Madly as he loved her he let her see this doubt."

"How could he!" broke from my lips.

"Oh, how could he!"

Mr. St. George sighed.

"She was very proud, and the doubt made her reckless. She never had a thought for any man but her husband, but in defiance, after the day she learned his doubts, she flirted madly—desperately. Rumour linked her name with mine. Your father expostulated—not with me, or I should have told him the truth for her sake, but with Lady Fortescue. She declared she would leave him. She kept her word. She chose a time for her flight when I was abroad, and the

first stage of her journey was Paris. She was half mad with wounded love, and so to be revenged on her husband for his doubts she let it appear to all the world that she left England to go to me."

I covered my face with my hands.

"Go on!"

"Sir Edward wrote to me telling me he should call me out if I ever returned to England. I replied, telling him I had never seen his wife from the day I said adieu to her in his own presence at the Grange. He took no further steps in the matter, for the sake, it was said, of his grand old name and of his only child."

"And my mother!"

"Too late she knew her mistake; she loved him, and she was an exile from his side; innocent, the whole world called her guilty. I was the only creature who believed in her, and I dared not offer her aid or sympathy—for her own sake she could have taken neither at my hands." The old man's voice broke strangely, and then he went on, slowly—

"I spent my life in seeking her. When I discovered her she was in a narrow street of Brussels teaching English. I went straight to a Roman Catholic priest and told him my story, how I was powerless to befriend her. I placed my time, my purse at his disposal; through his influence she was appointed Professor of English at one of the convents, and there, peaceful and forgotten, she still lives. There, not a year ago, I carried her the tidings of her widowhood, and of her daughter's marriage."

I was crying bitterly, I knew all now that had so puzzled me in the past—or I thought I did.

"You are Lord Cleve?" I said.

"I am. I had returned to the Manor the day before your father's death, not to stay, merely to have one glimpse at my home."

"And my mother is alive?"

"She is. She wears the dress of a Religious, and they call her Sister Beatrice; but for all that she is the Lady Fortescue, as pure and spotless a matron as on the day when I saw her first, a young and lovely wife leaning on her husband's arm."

"If I could only see her!"

"It is the wish of my heart. When she heard of your marriage she clasped her thin hands together as though she could bear anything now that you were safe! 'Reginald Bertram is a good man,' she said, simply. 'If I could have chosen my darling's husband from all the world I would have selected him!'"

"If I could only see her! Oh, Lord Cleve, if you knew how lonely I am!"

"Do you know your mother's charge to me, Lady Alwyn—the mission she confided to me?"

"How can I?"

"It was to watch over you. She knew that you had been brought up to believe her dead. If I saw you at the Earl's side a happy wife I was never to seek you out; I was to breathe no word of this sad history to you; she would be content to stay in her convent forgotten and believed dead, rather than cloud her child's future."

"That is black enough," I murmured.

"I know," said Lord Cleve, simply. "For give me, but I have seen, I know that Beatrice Fortescue's child cannot be the idle, aimless woman of fashion she strives to appear. I have thought that, like her mother, she was acting a part unworthy of her nobler self—that to hide some heavy grief she let herself be misjudged."

I could not answer him, it was all so true.

"Your mother's charge to me" he went on, "I can give you in her own words. 'If you see a shadow on my daughter's face—if it seems to you that she is in any danger of a fate like her mother's—tell her my story as a warning, beg her for my sake to pause ere she wrecks her own life and her husband's.'"

A long—long silence, then I looked up with tears shining in my eyes.

"You have seen us together—Lord Alwyn and I?"

"Often."

"Then you know my fate is not like my mother's; even in his jealousy my father idolized her. The Earl has no love left for me; he told me only yesterday he wished our marriage could be annulled."

But Lord Cleve would not hear me.

"He is a good man, and good men do not change. Besides, my child, no husband would weary of a face like yours, if for well-nigh fifteen years without a word to keep me faithful, without one hope of reward, I have kept constant to the memory of Lady Fortescue's beauty. Do you think Lord Alwyn can forget the beauty which is its counterpart, and which is his own?"

"Give me my mother's address," I begged. "If I may not go, surely I may write to her!"

"You may go if the Earl consents. Your mother is greatly beloved in her convent; and it is well-known there that she is a widow and her daughter is alive. It was only after your father's death that she took the actual vows of a nun, but she had long worn the dress and borne the name."

He gave the address. I wrote it down in feverish haste, and then with a firm handshake the man who has so influenced my whole life goes out from me.

I spend that afternoon alone; I could not have gone into the gay world after the story I have listened to. I make many fancy pictures of my meeting with Reginald. I imagine myself kneeling at his feet and whispering my love. I seem to dream of a happy future, and so I spend a pleasanter evening than I have done for weeks, and I go to bed wondering if the morning will bring me a letter from my husband.

And it does; my first letter, addressed in the hand I love so well. I never felt so proud of my title before as now that I see it for the first time in my husband's writing!

But, alas! the letter is not for me. It is in a totally different hand, begins "My Lord," and is dated from an office in the Temple.

I see it all. Reginald, in abstraction, has sent me the letter which summoned him to England instead of the one just written by himself to me.

I have no right to read it, but some wicked impulse prompts me. I begin, and curiosity makes me continue, though each line almost breaks my heart; and before I have turned a page I am punished sufficiently for a far more heinous offence.

The letter is from Reginald's lawyer, and contains a reply to a request of my husband that the firm would draw up for his approval a deed of separation between us, by which an ample income and a London house should be secured to me, and which would give me as much as possible of the freedom I renounced that August afternoon!

From the very tone of the letter I knew how unjust Reginald must have been. The lawyer was evidently a family friend, and he ventured on a respectful remonstrance with his client, warning him that it was very rash to launch a girl of eighteen upon the sea of London life, bound by a matrimonial vow, and yet with no husband's care and protection. Mr. Hill concluded by assuring the Earl that if his determination were unchangeable he would prepare the deed, but begging him to reconsider the matter.

I read the letter with streaming eyes. Had I fallen as low as this in my husband's love that a paid employee had to plead for pity on my behalf?

One thing I resolved—nothing in the world should make me return to Reginald after this convincing proof of how passionately he desired his freedom, and I would take nothing at his hands.

He should not have the power to say, that as I had married him for his money I had no further claim on him. My brain ached with weary thought. I was quite sure of one thing—I must leave the charming apartments in the Champs Elysées at once!

I must not be found there when Reginald returned with his proposal of separation.

But where could I go? A week ago I should have said it mattered nothing; that if I had to be a wanderer from my husband all places were alike to me. But after listening to my mother's story, young as I was, I knew better.

I must go straight to the protection of someone above suspicion—someone whose word would be believed by all the world, and who could prove unmistakably that if I left my husband I had not left him for the sake of anyone else.

In vain I tried to think of such a person. Sir Adrian Fortescue, my nearest kinsman, was not a person I cared to confide in. I could not take my story to my mother; Lord Cleve had spoken of her as at rest from all sorrow. How could I bring my wretched trials to disturb her peace? The Gibsons were too poor—besides, that was the first place in which Reginald would have sought at once!

At last an idea came into my head, so strange that I wondered I could have imagined it.

This Mr. Hill, whose letter had made me so heart-broken, was evidently a trusted friend of my husband. If I threw myself upon his protection he could hardly refuse me shelter until such time as I had formed my plan. His word would be above all questioning; and there was such a vein of pity running through his letter for myself, as a stranger, that I thought he could not but be kind when he saw me face to face.

I had some money. Reginald was generously itself. Over one hundred pounds were in my purse; that would surely keep me until Mr. Hill had found me something to do! I never seemed to doubt his willingness.

I sat down and wrote my farewell letter to my husband, for I meant to leave Paris that night. Instinct told me directly Reginald discovered his mistake he would return to me. He was too generous to leave such tidings unexplained. Very possibly he would reach the gay French capital within an hour of my quitting it.

I took a large envelope from my desk and enclosed in it the letter sent me by mistake; then, on a blank sheet of paper, I traced these lines:—

"I have read your wishes and will aid you to carry them out. The love you said would last my life has indeed cooled quickly; but perhaps it was my fault. All shall be as you wish, save one thing—I will take neither riches nor houses from you. You shall never be able to say you spent your fortune on the unloved wife who has become a burden to you. Do not fear that I shall do anything to disgrace your name; I mean to work for my living honestly as I should have had to work last August if you had not married me. I have left all your presents. The money in my purse I am obliged to take, because, until I get work, I shall need it for daily bread."

Here I stopped, my tears almost blinded me; then, on an uncontrollable impulse, I added these lines:—

"Our marriage has been unhappy; but it was not all my fault. You told me you would teach me to love you, and I believed you; how was I to guess that by the time I had learned the lesson (and it was a self-taught one after all), you would have grown so weary of me?—you would be constituting lawyers as to the best means of separating from your miserable.

"IRENE."

CHAPTER III.

Mrs. W.W.

Mr. maid was a little surprised when she received my instructions to pack a small trunk as quickly as possible; but my explanation was very simple.

"Urgent family affairs obliged me to return to England. I had written to the Earl; but in case, through any accident, it was delayed, and he returned to Paris instead of joining me in London, she was to give him the letter she would find in my desk.

"But am I not to accompany you, my lady?"

I shook my head.

"I am going only through necessity, Mary and my arrival may be quite unexpected. I would rather not trouble my friends to make room for you."

"But, my lady, how are you to manage—*you* who are so used to be waited on?"

"I shall manage somehow!"

And badly as my heart ached I stood over her as she packed, and directed which dresses should be taken and which left. Then she arrayed me in a plain black cashmere and a small, close-fitting bonnet. A bitter evening in February, Mary wished to wrap me in my warm fur-lined cloak, but the sables had been Reginald's gift, and so I waived them aside.

I gave one look at myself in the glass as I went downstairs, and I thought, sorrowfully, I looked very little fitted to battle with the world. I had never been very strong, and the luxuries which had surrounded me since my marriage—the late hours I had kept in Paris—above all, the aching pain at my heart, had all combined to give me a delicacy of appearance very ill-suited for one who has to earn her own bread.

Mary, at my express desire, attended me to the station, saw me safely into the *compartiment des dames seules*, and stood watching with tears in her eyes until the train was out of sight. She was very fond of me; I might not have been a good mistress, but my maid really loved me, and it added another to the many regrets which tore my soul that I was losing her faithful service for ever.

There were other ladies in the carriage with me, and one or two showed a desire to enter into conversation, but I resolutely declined their overtures, and pillowing my head on my arm I was soon to all appearances asleep.

They revenged themselves then; each of the three had something to say about my reserve and disdain, my pride and want of courtesy.

"Perhaps she was really tired," said a young girl opposite me. "I am sure, mamma, she looks just worn out."

"Nonsense, Alice, she only gives herself airs; she can't be anyone to speak of, or her mother would never let her travel alone!"

"I think she is a married lady, mamma; there is a wedding-ring on her left hand."

"Ah!"

And then they subsided into silence, and between dozing and grumbling the weary hours wore away, and almost before I had realized my position I stood on the deck of a steamer bound for England.

It was a bright, calm winter's morning, and our passage across the channel was a swift one. When I stood on the pier at Dover an awful loneliness took possession of me; I had often longed for my native land, but I had never thought to revisit it thus. As I saw my fellow-passengers exchange greeting with the friends come to welcome them a pang smote my heart.

But the dire need for exertion roused me from my grief; I hired a fly and saw my solitary box placed on its roof. Unsuitable as was the hour, I had quite resolved that I must drive some distance—all due to my whereabouts must be lost.

My Jehu, an honest man enough, drove me to Folkestone, and at one of the hotels there I breakfasted, and then took the London train; but my box was so light that the porter made no objection to its being in the same carriage with me, therefore, instead of pursuing my journey to London I alighted at New Cross, left my luggage in the cloak-room, and was then free to pursue the object in my mind—to find Mr. Hill and throw myself on his mercy.

But it was early still, so early that when I reached the office in the Temple no one was there but the clerks. I did not even penetrate into the outer office, I felt so forlorn and miserable. I did not even knock at the door, I stood near it reading the names emblazoned

upon it, "Hill and Fisher." Oh! what a painful significance one had for me!

At last a shabby youth came out—doubtless the office boy—to do the morning errands; he was tall and lanky, his whole appearance had a depressed air, but I liked his face, and, summoning all my courage, I addressed him.

"Can I see Mr. Hill?"

"Mr. Hill, miss!" he returned in amazement; "why, he's retired from practice; he never comes here except it's to see one of his old clients on some private business. Mr. Fisher will be here at eleven."

"I must see Mr. Hill." I stammered; "no one else in the world will do."

The shabby youth pondered.

"Do you know him, miss?"

"He is the only friend I have in the world," thinking of his generous letter.

"Then you'd better go down to his private house, miss; he lives at Leckhampton, in Kent; you'll get a train from Charing Cross quite easily; his house is called Florenceville, and a very pretty place it is."

There was no help for it. I had elected to make Mr. Hill my champion and confidant, but I felt it would have been much easier to tell him my story in his office. He might have a wife and a dozen inquisitive children; what would they think of my sudden apparition?

But I must do something; it was quite clear I could not spend the day in the Temple, so I thanked the shabby youth, and dragged my weary feet to Charing Cross railway station, feeling a wild longing the while, that it would not be wrong to throw myself into the bright waters of Father Thames which flowed so pleasantly near me.

I thought the train would never get to Leckhampton, and even when I at last saw that time-honoured name on a hoarding my task was not ended.

To such of my readers as know Leckhampton, with its suburban roads, its endless detached houses, each called by a different name, it will be easy to see the difficulties still in my way.

Florenceville, Leckhampton. The words seemed burnt into my brain, and yet how difficult it was to find the place I sought. I must have walked miles up long, straight private roads before at last I saw the magic name inscribed upon an unpretentious brown gate.

It was a simple detached house standing in its own grounds. The borders were bright with crocuses, and as I walked up the drive I felt certain it was a happy home, there was such an air of peace and well-being about the whole place; even the servant who came in answer to my ring looked as though life went pleasantly with her.

"Is Mr. Hill at home?"

"No, miss."

I sighed, the disappointment was so keen.

"I want to see him very much," I said, sadly, "I have come a long way, and I do not know when I can be here again."

"The master will be home at seven, miss; or Miss Florence is in now if you would like to see her."

I was going to say "No"—I felt in no humour for an interview with a gossiping school-girl—when a lady came forward. She was tall and graceful, and she wore a soft, clinging grey dress, but there was something in her face which touched me at once. The servant repeated what I had said.

"I am very sorry," said the girl, simply; "but my father is sure to be home by seven. Will you come in and wait for him? I know it is a great many hours, but it may be better for you than coming again in this bitter weather."

She led me upstairs to take off my things, then she brought me into the cosy dining-room where lunch was ready.

She waited on me as though I had been a loved and expected guest, and when the meal was over she asked me to come into her study.

"I generally sit here when I am alone in

winter; our drawing-room seems so cold for one person."

She drew me a low rocking-chair close by the fire, and a beautiful tabby cat, who had been basking on the rug, jumped into my lap. I bent to caress him, and then I burst into tears. I was thinking I had no right to be here—I ought to be a wanderer from everything good and pleasant, since I had been so wicked that Reginald was tired of me.

Florence Hill came to my side, and put one arm round my neck.

"I cannot bear to see you so," she said, gently. "Won't you tell me if there is nothing I can do to help you?"

"No one can help me, Miss Hill!"

"You are in trouble."

"I think my heart is broken," I said, in a kind of choked voice. "I have come all the way from France to see your father, because I hoped he would be a friend to me."

"I am sure he will. Does he expect you?" "He has never seen me in his life; but I think he is a just man, and that he will be kind to me."

"And you are going to stay in England?"

"I do not know—I have no home. I want your father to help me to some honest work."

She looked at my delicate white hands, at my beautiful rings.

"I don't think you are fit for work," she said, kindly. "Wouldn't it be better if papa found you a home where you could be happy?"

"I shall never be happy again."

"You are too young to say that."

"I am nearly nineteen!"

"And I am nine-and-twenty. The grief which crushes you now will yield to time. When you are as old as I am you will know that the loss of those we love does not blight our lives for ever, no matter how dear they have been to us."

I knew that she was thinking of my black dress.

"It isn't that at all," I explained. "Papa has been dead six months, and I know he is better off. My sorrow is a living one."

And then for the first time she caught sight of the plain gold ring upon my finger. She looked at me; and, broken down by that silent sympathy, I flung myself into her arms, and shed my bitter tears upon her breast.

"May I tell you everything?" I sobbed. "It is so hard to bear it all alone; and you will keep my secret?"

"I will keep it faithfully; you may trust me as if I were your sister."

"Do you know your father's clients?"

"Very few of them. Do you mean that your husband is one of them?"

"Yes! He has written to your father to ask how we can be separated. He is as tired of me as that. I am Lady Alwyn."

She started.

"I have heard of you often; but there must be some mistake, surely? I remember the day before your marriage. Lord Alwyn came here to see papa, and if ever happiness was written on any human face it was written on his."

"He did love me once," I admitted, frankly; "but I disappointed him."

"And you have left him?"

"When I knew he wished to be free from me could I stay? Miss Hill, would any woman linger at her husband's side when she knew she was unwelcome?"

"You are so young," pleaded Florence; "dear, you have your whole life before you. It seems so terrible such a trouble should assail you at the outset."

"Do you think Mr. Hill will help me?"

"I am sure he will do what he can for your parents' sake. You have every claim on him."

"Have I?"

"Sir Edward Fortescue's father was papa's earliest client, and your mother was a sort of ward of his. She spent three months with us once. I was quite a child, but I have never forgotten how sweet she was. I have been wondering all this time of whom you reminded me, but

I know now. Your eyes and hair could only belong to her child."

It was a little before seven when Mr. Hill came in. Florence went to him at once. I knew in her rare generosity she meant to spare me the pain of telling him my own story.

For quite twenty minutes I was left alone. Then an old man entered with a strangely noble bearing and the kindest face I ever saw. I ran to him, and took his hand.

"Oh, sir, has Miss Hill told you, and will you help me?"

"I will help you with all my power, my lady."

"Because," and a hot blush dyed my cheek, "I mean to earn my own living. Lord Alwyn is quite tired of me, you know, and I cannot be a burden to him, you see."

The old lawyer took my hand in his.

"My dear young lady, he does not think you so. There may have been disagreements between you, but no husband could look on you as a burden."

"Have you seen him?" I demanded.

"I was with him all day yesterday. He seemed to forgive me—sad and anxious. I am sure this proposed separation is painful to him."

"It is his own idea, and he must abide by it."

Mr. Hill looked aghast.

"You will allow me to go to him to—"

"No," I interrupted him feverishly; "I will take nothing at his hands. I mean to be as lost to him as though I were dead, only I must do nothing that would bring a shadow on his name. That is why I have come to you. I thought you would help me."

And then, feeling he was against me I tottered towards the door, and would have opened it, but the excitement I had undergone was too much for me. I reeled and fell, and then a mist came before my eyes. I remembered nothing more until I found myself in a pretty, white bed with Florence Hill seated at its side.

I looked searchingly round the room. I thought I had seen it before, but I was not sure. Florence laid one hand caressingly on my head.

"You have been very ill."

"Where am I?"

"At Leckenhamb with us. This is my room, and you are my patient, so I must not let you talk too much."

But I turned my eyes on her imploringly. She understood their question.

"No one knows that you are here. We have told the doctor that you are Mrs. Wynn, the wife of one of papa's favourite clients who is abroad. We will keep your secret very faithfully, dear."

"Call me Irene," I petitioned.

"I must not if you wish to keep your secret; the name is too uncommon not to excite notice."

The days passed on, but my recovery was very slow—so slow, that sometimes I thought I was going to have my wish, and be at rest for ever.

In the afternoon they used to dress me and carry me across the landing to Florence's little study. And here my host came to see me one evening, about a month after my arrival.

He took both my hands kindly, and told me I had been a long time getting better; and then he wiped his spectacles suspiciously, and I fancied his eyes were not quite dry. I took hold of one of his big hands and carried it to my lips.

"I never meant to be such a trouble to you, Mr. Hill, indeed; and I'll go away the moment I can walk, and work very hard to pay you back. Indeed, I have some money now, only Florence never will let me talk of spending it."

"Lady Alwyn, you can never hurt me more than by speaking like this. If you will not return to your husband I hope you will stay with us; you are far too young to roam the world alone, and I owe too much to your grandparents not to feel it a privilege to entertain you. Only, my child,"—and his voice was very grave

"from my heart I advise you to be reconciled to your husband; however much you may have differed, believe me it is your wisest course."

"He was tired of me."

"Are you sure? Do you know, he looks an altered man since you left him?"

"He is afraid I may disgrace him. He need not fear; I am as proud as he!"

"And you persist in keeping your secret from him? You still hold me to my promise?"

Yes!"

"Then will you make me one in return?"

"What is it?"

"Stay here and share our home. Florence loves you well, and I cannot bear to think of your mother's child wandering about the face of the earth."

"I would stay gladly, only—"

"I know what you would say, but I am a rich man, and such a fairy as you adds nothing to the expenses of my establishment. My dear, I would willingly keep you always; only for your own sake and another's I pray from all my heart that you may be reconciled to your husband."

So it was settled. I remained at Florenceville, and my kind friends did all they could to nurse me into health, only my recovery was very slow. The doctor complained openly of my lack of interest in life.

"It's easy to talk," I said bitterly to Florence "but when one has nothing to look forward to, nothing to hope for, what is the good of getting better?"

"What would you like to look forward to?"

"Nothing!"

"What do you fear most in the future?" she asked me. "What troubles you most?"

"I think it is the loneliness," I sobbed. "You see, all my life I have been first with somebody. My father worshipped me, and for a little while my husband loved me, and now there is no one!"

"Don't misunderstand," I added, struck by a pang of remorse as I saw her looking very grave and thoughtful. "Don't think me ungrateful! I know how good you have been to me, and I shall never forget your kindness, but—"

"But it is not the same as love from someone very near to you. Is that what you mean, dear?"

"Yes!"

"Then, my darling, don't despair; if love will make you happy, love is coming to you."

"What do you mean, Florence?"

"When the June roses bloom, dear, you will have someone to love—someone who is all your own. Oh! my darling, won't you relent and let us write to your husband now and tell him that his child's voice will soften your heart to him?"

"My child!"

I had never known a mother's tenderness; I always thought I cared very little for children, but somehow those two magic words sent a thrill of joy through my heart. Reginald's child! it would be something to live for, something to cherish; and, oh! if it had its father's eyes, how I should love it!

"Are you sure?"

"I am quite sure. Will you not let my father write to the Earl now?"

"No!" I cried, with passionate strength. "Florence, you shall never write. Do you think I could go back to him and hold the second place in his heart? Can I forget that he once loved me for myself, and be happy in the affection he may accord his child's mother?"

"But the child, dear. Is it right to rob it of a father's love and care?"

I hesitated.

"It will have me," I said defiantly; "babies want nothing but their mother. Reginald has his title, his riches, and his estates; I shall have nothing in the world but my little child. I don't think I am robbing him."

They never mentioned the subject again, only when the June roses bloomed and my boy lay in his little cradle I almost wished they

had broken their promise to me and summoned my husband, for I longed for him with all my heart.

My baby was a bright, beautiful boy; he had his own share of my love, but he could not have his father's. The more I looked at his little sleeping face the more I yearned for Reginald; waking and dreaming the one desire haunted me to see him once again, and to put our son into his arms.

And it could never be! For all time we were separated—he would go his way, I mine. No tidings of him ever reached me; I did not even know if he had sought me, or if he had accepted that brief letter of farewell as final.

When my child was two months old we all went down to the seaside for change of air. Florence idolized my little son, and I am sure Mr. Hill could not have been prouder of a grandson. My father had been dead a year now, and so I laid aside my heavy crepe-trimmed dresses and took to cool white cambrics and soft grey Lilacs—my black ribbons alone denoting my mourning.

I had no money difficulties. The bank-notes I had brought from Paris were not exhausted when Florence came into my room one day with a cheque in her hand, telling me I must be her father's second daughter, and this was my quarter's allowance.

We all enjoyed the seaside very much, and my boy threw in the beautiful fresh breezes; my spirits revived in the sunshine, and I felt like a different creature in my shady hat, from the weary, depressed traveller who had just come to Leckenhamb.

One morning I came in from the beach with my hair floating round me in a golden cloud, my hat disordered, and a bright pink colour on my cheeks. Florence met me on the threshold.

"Beatrice!"

She had adopted this name as a compromise between "Irene" and "Mrs. Wynn,"—the former being dangerous and the latter too cold.

"What is it?"

"Dear, I hardly know how to tell it you. The Dowager Lady Alwyn and Miss Bertram are in the drawing-room; and I have been obliged to ask them to stay to dinner."

Reginald's mother and sister—the woman I had always fancied turned his heart against me! Well, I could face them; they had never seen me. I might have felt nervous had I met them in my own true character, but as Mrs. Wynn it mattered very little to me what they thought of me.

"Well, I'll go and smooth my hair. I shan't be long!"

Florence stared at me.

"And you really don't mind?"

"Not at all!"

But I suppose I did a little, for I lingered over my toilette—a clean, white cambric dress, a fresh black sash, and round my throat the massive gold chain, which supported the locket with Reginald's portrait. I had often meant to leave off wearing it, only somehow I never could.

I opened the drawing-room door and went in. Reginald's mother was tall and stately, in lace and silk; her daughter equally tall, but without the stateliness—Julia was undeniably plain, very stiff, and awkward-looking, without one trace of her mother's pride or her mother's attractions.

"This is my friend, Mrs. Wynn."

"The little boy's mother?" commented Lady Alwyn, affably. "Well, my dear, you look a child yourself!"

To my intense amazement my unknown relations took a great fancy to me. I suppose knowing I had nothing to do with them they were not critical. The things which would have been crimes in Lady Alwyn were charming in Mrs. Wynn. In fact, when I was turning over an album for Julia's benefit, I overheard her mother cross-questioning Florence.

"And the husband is abroad? I wonder he cares to stay away from such a family!"

"He cannot help himself, unfortunately!"

"Ah! poor!"

"No; they have ample means. We take the best care we can of them in his absence. I think we all love the baby dearly; he was born at Leckenham, and we seem, therefore, to have a sort of property in him."

"A splendid child!" and she gave a little sigh.

When they took leave they gave us a pressing invitation to visit them at their hotel. Mrs. Bertram specially included me.

"Well!"

I looked inquiringly at Florence, but she would not answer, so I was obliged to put my question into a more definite form.

"I suppose they did not mention Reginald?"

"I thought I heard them complimenting you upon his loveliness!"

"You know I did not mean baby!"

"Whom, then?"

"My husband!"

"Dear, don't you know you have forbid me to speak his name to you!"

"Did they mention him?"

"They said he was in London. Lady Alwyn told me his wife's health necessitated her living abroad, and openly lamented it."

"Then she does not know?"

"The Earl seems to have kept the secret to himself, and done without even his mother's sympathy, rather than cast a reflection on you."

"Do you know, Florence, I rather liked her!"

"Who?"

"Lady Alwyn!"

"And she was singing your praises. She says you are to be much pitied for having such a neglectful husband."

I sighed and walked away; somehow the success of my self-concealment hardly affords me the vivid satisfaction it used to do.

I would have liked Reginald's mother to have a slight suspicion of my identity.

I had no intention of seeking my husband; but, oh! how gladly would I have received him, had he only come without the seeking!

CHAPTER IV.

THE LOCKET.

REGINALD's mother and sister prolonged their stay at Carstairs, and we met often, in a little place where people took the same walks, frequented the same amusements; it was impossible to help this. At first I struggled against it; I did not want to be intimate with my husband's family. I argued that I had nothing in common with them; but after a few days I yielded to Miss Bertram's importunities. I accompanied Florence when she went to lunch at the hotel, and I even accepted the offer of a few drives in the carriage which was really my own.

Julia Bertram and Florence Hill had been schoolfellows, and seemed glad to renew their old intimacy, so that I generally fell to my mother-in-law's share as companion, and her favourite topic of conversation was her son. She was never tired of telling me of the Earl's doings, of his schooldays, his early manhood, his talents and popularity; but she never once touched upon the subject of his marriage—that was evidently a painful topic.

"Shall you stay here much longer, Mrs. Wynn?" she asked me, kindly, one day about a month after our first meeting.

"I think we are going home the week after next," I returned, calmly. "Florence never likes to be away from Leckenham longer than see can help."

"Then you return with them? I thought perhaps Mr. Wynn would be coming home to see his wife and make acquaintance with his little boy."

I felt a vivid crimson dye my face and neck.

"There is no chance of his return."

"You bear up very bravely, but it must be a hard trial for you to be separated so soon after your marriage."

"It is better now," I answered, cheerfully.

"I have baby, and the Hills are kindness it self."

"I wonder if they would spare you to me for a little time: I should be delighted to welcome you to Alwyn Castle. It is my son's place really, but he and his wife live mostly abroad."

"I am very much obliged, but it is quite impossible; I have made up my mind to live in complete retirement while my husband is away."

She looked at me approvingly.

"I can see you are a devoted wife; but really the Castle is as retired as a convent; Reginald has never cared for it."

"He may some day."

To my surprise her eyes filled with tears.

"It is my fault, my dear, entirely. I don't know why it is I trouble you with my sorrows, but I feel drawn towards you strangely ever since I saw you."

I put my hand in hers.

"I have had a great deal of sorrow myself, perhaps that is why you feel so."

"But your sorrows are not of your own making. You must know, Mrs. Wynn, for years it has been my one wish that Reginald should marry—for years I had despaired of seeing him with a wife, and last summer he came on a flying visit to tell me he was engaged, and, of course I ought to have been glad."

"Weren't you?"

"There were more than twenty years between them, my dear; she was a mere child, the daughter of my son's first love. I could not but deem the whole thing very unsuitable, and I said so."

I felt a bitter pang; the truth of Lord Cleve's story came home to me now—Reginald was the suitor of whom my father robbed my mother. Truly he had suffered enough through our family!

"I suppose the Earl resented your speech?"

"So much so that he has never come to Alwyn since he married the young lady and took her abroad. Report goes that she is very beautiful and very delicate, but I am not allowed to judge. Reginald comes to England sometimes, and then he gives me a few stray hours; but he will never let me see his wife—he refuses even to mention her name."

"Perhaps he is tired of her," I suggested; "and does not like to let you guess how real your objections were."

She shook her head.

"The Earl is not a man to change, Mrs. Wynn. No, he cannot forgive me those few slighting words, and so he keeps his wife aloof from me."

It dawned on me slowly that she meant just what she said, that in her life of luxurious loneliness her thoughts did wander regretfully to the young wife she had never seen, her son's choice. I sighed, and when I looked up at her my eyes were full of tears.

"It will come right some day," I said, with a confidence I was far from feeling. "Why don't you tell Lord Alwyn frankly you wish to see his wife?"

It struck me as I spoke that he would find the wish one very difficult to satisfy; but she seemed delighted at the idea.

"I think I shall; he has promised to run down here for a day or two before he returns to France."

When I got home that afternoon I begged Florence to find out when my husband was likely to come to Carstairs, that I might keep in the shelter of our own pretty cottage, meanwhile; then, as I began to dress, I uttered a bitter cry; the locket was gone from my chain, Reginald's first present—the only one I had preserved, the sole likeness of him I should have in future years to show to his child—was lost!

I was so wretched at the loss itself that I forgot the aggravation of it by the probability I had dropped my treasure in Lady Alwyn's carriage; I only felt sure of one thing—I could not live without that locket. Florence was all

sympathy, and before nightfall bills were in every shop window describing the locket and offering a liberal reward for its restoration.

"It will never come back!" I said, sadly; "it has fallen into his mother's hands and she will guess my secret and keep my locket."

"Nonsense!" said Florence, gravely, "she is not a thief."

Mr. Hill was in London, but seeing my agony of grief Florence wrote a few lines, describing my loss and begging the cushions, &c., of the carriage might be searched. The reply was prompt and kind; she would give orders to that effect, but feared they would be fruitless; the first thing she noticed when I joined her was that I wore no locket, she was so accustomed to see it round my neck that its absence struck her at once.

"Patience, dear," said Florence, tenderly, "your worst fears are groundless; if any ordinary person found the locket your liberal reward would ensure its return."

I went to bed early that night and cried myself to sleep. In the morning Florence went out shopping, and she had no sooner departed than the servant came to tell me a gentleman had called to see Miss Hill "about the locket."

For precaution sake all the handbills spoke of her as the loser, in each case the finder was to apply to her for the reward.

"Oh, show him in," I cried, joyfully; "he won't know whether I am Miss Hill; I shall do just as well."

Another moment and my husband stood before me. At the sight of me he grew very pale; I had forgotten the changes six months had made in me. I looked younger than ever in my white dress, and with my hair over my shoulders, I am quite sure for one moment Reginald was puzzled.

"Won't you speak to me?" I cried, indignant. "Of course, I know you came here to see Florence, but as we have met you might speak one word to me."

In a moment I was in his arms, a strange gladness shone in his face, and yet his first words were a reproach.

"Do you know you have nearly broken my heart?"

"I haven't! I did the very thing that ought to have pleased you—you wanted to get rid of me, and I went away of my own accord."

"Irene!"

"You were dreadfully unkind to me; you had quite left off loving me, and I was as miserable as ever I could be. But for one thing I would gladly have died!"

"Hush!" he said, gravely. "Irene, you must not speak like that; I loved you as my own soul when I married you, that love has never changed—never once."

"But then, why—"

"I thought I had made a mistake—that it had been unkindly selfish to chain your bright youth to my dull middle-age, and so I resolved to give you as much freedom as the law would permit—to free you from the society of an elderly, unloved husband."

I was playing with the buttons of his coat.

"I think it was very stupid of you—you might have seen."

"Have seen what?"

"That I was very unhappy."

"I did see it."

"I thought I had worn your love out, and just when I wanted to tell you that—"

"Tell me now," he whispered, bending over me.

"I love you," I said, rather crestfallen. "I don't think you deserve it one bit, but I love you better than anything else in the world!"

And then my head fell back upon his shoulder and I realized dimly that it had found its true resting-place at last, and that whatever trials and sorrows the future might have in store, I could meet them all bravely, safe in the shelter of my husband's love.

Not for a long time did I think to ask—

"How did you find me?"

"I did not think of finding you. I picked

this up last night and recognised it as yours," holding up my precious locket. "I said nothing to anyone, but this morning I went out to try and discover the owner; on all hands I was directed to apply to Miss Hill; I thought it might be she could give me tidings of my darling."

"And you came here to see your mother?"

"Yes; I don't think she will have much of my society, though, now I have found my wife. Irene, where have you hidden yourself from me?"

"At Leckenhurst."

"You went to Hill's? I never thought of that; and yet I might have guessed he had a guilty secret, he has avoided me so persistently."

"He has been like a father to me!" I cried, indignantly; "and Florence is an angel!"

"You've had rivals in her angel ministrations though, I expect," he said, simply; "for my mother is full of a Mrs. Wynn, who is staying with the Hills, and is a paragon of grace and beauty. By the way, my darling, where did you hide yourself during my mother's visit?"

"I didn't hide at all—I saw her."

"But—"

"And do you know, she really liked me very much. Reginald, can't you guess—I am Mrs. Wynn!"

A strange, questioning look came into his face. I answered the look.

"Yes, Mrs. Wynn is not alone. Oh, Reginald, you will try to love my baby for my sake, won't you? he is so beautiful, and he has your eyes."

"And you could keep that from me?" he said reproachfully; "you meant to bring up my child a stranger to me! Oh, Irene!"

The tears stood in my eyes.

"I don't think I could have managed to keep my secret much longer. I often wished Florence or Mr. Hill would disobey me, and send for you."

"Why not send yourself?"

"Because—"

"My darling," said Reginald, fondly, "don't you think, if we are to be happy, we must have no secrets from each other?"

"I didn't want to be forgiven for his sake," I said, tearfully; "you had loved me once, and I did not want to be just 'put up with,' because I was your child's mother."

"Then you do care a little for my love?"

"I care so much that, having to do without it, has just blighted my life!"

"You will never have to do without it again, my darling! You are—you will be—my first, my dearest! No son could ever take that place from you."

Well, we did not stay long at Carsairs. Of course Mrs. Bertram and Julia had to be told, and they received me very amiably; in fact, I fancy my mother-in-law believes, in some vague way, she brought about our reconciliation. We let her think so, though we never quite agree with her.

I said good-bye to Florence and her father with regret, and then Reginald took me and the small, unconscious Viscount Bertram abroad. There were no secrets between us now; together we visited a convent near Brussels, and together we laid a chaplet of flowers on the grave of Sister Beatrice.

"We called on 'Mr. St. George' in his quiet stage and let him see with his own eyes that happiness had dawned for the child of his life's love. And then, when we had wandered in many pleasant places, and seen many lovely things, we came back to England to keep Christmas at Alwyn Castle. And as for the first time I stood in my husband's grand old home, welcoming his guests, instead of rubies or diamonds there flashed on my neck a locket of deep, dead gold, in the centre, in a twisted monogram of pearls are the two letters 'I' and 'R.'

"And you have that still," says Florence Hill, a little mischievously, coming into my dressing room later on; "don't you think now

you have the original yet might dispense with the copy?"

"I shall wear it while I live!" I answered. "It ever I am foolish enough to doubt my happiness again, it will remind me of all the misery I brought myself before."

She smiled and kissed me as she said,

"You mean the misery caused by Irene's Mistakes," said you to whom I addressed you [THIS END.]

FACETIES.

A PHILOSOPHICAL son of Erin was overheard remarking to a friend, "Have a good time while you live; for you're a long while dead."

Self-reservation is the first law of nature. "What makes chickens come out of their shell, they must be so nice and warm and comfortable inside?" "P'raps it's because they're afraid of being boiled."

A QUESTION THAT IS COMING TO THE FAIR.—A strong-minded young lady said to her dressmaker the other day, "If women are ever allowed to vote, what do you suppose will be the fashion for voting-dresses?"

A LITTLE girl, accompanying her mother on a visit to an old lady, the latter showed the child her parrot, in a cage by the window, warning her at the same time not to go too near, lest he should bite her. "Why should he bite me?" she asked. "Because, my dear, he doesn't know you." "Then please tell him that I am Mary Ann."

A PARISIAN jeweller has long dunned a lady of fashion for the amount of his bill, but in vain. When he rings the bell the footman says, politely but firmly: "Sir, the countess receives only on Tuesdays." "I don't care when she receives!" thunders the irate and long-suffering creditor. "What I want to know is the day she pays on."

"WHAT beautiful trees is that?" asked a gentleman of an organ-grinder. "Silfra tredi monigo," said the Italian. The gentleman rushed into the nearest shop, resolved to get the music. "Have you the Italian song 'Silfra tredi monigo'?" The shopman looked, but couldn't find it. "How does it go?" The gentleman whistled a bar or two, and the clerk brought him "Silver Threads Among the Gold."

PHILOSOPHY TAUGHT IN THE KITCHEN.—The new cook has been strongly recommended; but the first three dinners have been something dreadful, and the mistress has ventured on a few words. Cook: "Well, mem, I dare say you think you're right; but wherever I've been cook before they generally found it best to take things as I give 'em."

One of those ladies who take much better care of their animal-pets than they do of their children, has got a pet poodle by the name of Fido. Yesterday, Mrs. Schinkey's little boy, Bob, asked his mother: "Shall I give Fido this piece of sugar he is begging for?" "No, my child, it might spoil his teeth; eat it yourself, Bobby."

"My love," said one lady to another, "you heard, I suppose, that Amanda is about to marry Arthur?" "I know it," was the reply, "and what I can't understand is that a woman as intelligent as she is can consent to marry a man who is stupid enough to marry her."

This anecdote is related by Mr. Barnum in illustration of the axiom that drinking is a habit that grows. "Last winter two of my elephants began shaking with chills one morning. The keepers ran down into the village and got six gallons of whisky. Hastily returning, three gallons were given to each elephant. Fortunately it cured them. They liked the artificial warmth it superinduced. Next morning when the keeper came to them, he found both elephants shaking with might and main. 'No, you don't!' he shouted. 'You are well enough to-day; and they stopped shaking.'

JONES (a wealthy testator, who is giving a dinner to Parcher on strictly temperance principles)—"John, it is very close in here. Can't you open something?" Parcher (with eagerness)—"Yes! that's a good idea! Open a bottle."—*Life, etc. etc. I like Liberal A*

"I don't want no rubbish, no fine sentiments, if you please," said the widow who was asked what kind of an epitaph she desired for her late husband's tombstone. "Let it be short and simple, something like this:—William Johnson, aged 75 years. The good die young."

A LADY taking tea at a small company, being very fond of her hot rolls, was asked to have another. "Really, I cannot," she modestly replied. "I don't know how many I have eaten already." "I do," unexpectedly cried a juvenile upstart whose mother had allowed him a seat at the table. "You've eaten eight. I've been counting."

SECURELY HUNTED.—"Making a call, the other day," writes a fair correspondent, "I casually opened a Bible on the drawing-room table while waiting for my friend. There was a folded piece of paper inside, and it was marked—I couldn't help seeing it—Receipt for punches." My friend entered at that moment, and I handed it to her. "Why, where in the world did you get that?" she asked; "I've been looking for it for this six months!"

A YOUNG masquerader, dressed in a faultless suit and a pair of shoes that tapered into a point in the most modern style, was visiting in a rural district. A bright little boy looked him all over until his eyes rested on those shoes. He looked at his own chubby feet, and then at his visitor's; and then, looking up, said, "Master, is all your toes cut off but one?"

A PARTY OF VEGETARIANS were strolling through a meadow where a herd of cattle were grazing, when one of the beasts becoming furious at the sight of a red shawl worn by a young lady, chased her with such fury that she only just managed to escape with her life over a stile at the end of the meadow. "You horrid, bloodthirsty brute!" cried the girl, trembling in every limb, as she watched the infuriated animal on the other side of the hedge. "This is your gratitude to me for touching nothing but vegetables for the last six months! From to day I shall begin to eat roast beef again!"

COMPLIMENTARY.—An anecdote which is going the rounds of the religious papers is to the effect that in a certain public office in England an old German, who was one of several foreigners employed to translate some papers in a case under examination, was shown by one of the commissioners, a notedly pious man, a name on a certain list, and was asked what had become of him. The German replied, "Oh! he is dead and gone to Old Nick!" The commissioner, horror-struck, replied, "My dear sir, you must not speak of him in that way." "Never-a-mind," said the German "never-a-mind." Then, in a mysterious and emphatic whisper, he added, "You wait; some day you'll see!"

A POOR ARTIST.—A pretty girl had a bashful artist for a sweetheart, and he never would come to the point. One night, after he had made a desperate attempt to test her feelings, she looked at him in a very significant way.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked, with a startled look.

"Do you profess to be an artist?" she replied, evasively.

"Yes."

"Do you think you are a good one?"

"I flatter myself that I am."

"Well, I don't think so."

"Why not?"

"Because you cannot even draw an inference."

He did, though, and now that girl supports him by taking lodgers, and thinks he is a poorer artist than ever.

SOCIETY.

A rumour comes from Copenhagen to the effect that the Princess Victoria, second daughter of the German Crown Prince, is about to be engaged to Prince Waldemar of Denmark.

A banner has just been hung in Windsor Castle, by the Duke of Wellington's agent, the Duke's Strathfieldsaye estate being held by virtue of this ceremony being performed annually on the anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo.

The Princess Louise will, it is reported, bring home a number of paintings which she has made of Canadian scenes and localities of interest, and they will be exhibited in London at some favoured fine art association; which one that will be it is easy to predict.

The wedding dress of the Hon. Ismay Fitzroy, eldest daughter of the late Lord Southampton, was of great magnificence, being composed of the richest ivory satin, with Brussels point lace, and deep fringes of orange blossoms. The attendant bridesmaids wore dresses of white Indian muslin, with flowers of white lace, and trimmed with Cardinal satin ribbon, white straw hats, ornamented with lace and red roses.

The Duke of Connaught will leave England in the autumn for India to assume the command of the Meerut division. Lord Downe will accompany him as his aide-de-camp. In the spring the duke will succeed Gen. the Hon. Arthur Hardinge as Commander-in-Chief at Bombay, and Lieut-Col. Ronald Lowe will be his military secretary. The duke, as at present arranged, will remain in India for two years.

The genial old Lady Ashbrooke was most vivacious and chatty to her friends who were delighted to greet her at Queen's Gate-terrace on her ninety-third birthday, and was well able to accept their good wishes for more years yet to be spent among her circle. She received a wealth of flowers, and was dressed in really a becoming dress of blue satin, with soft lace and flowers as a cap framing her dear old face. May she next year receive her friends as well in health and blithe in spirits!

THAT very admirable institution, the new Chelsea Hospital for Women, in the Fulham Road, will be formally opened by H.R.H. the Duchess of Albany, on Tuesday, July 10, at four o'clock. The board of management are making an earnest appeal to enable the new building to be opened free of debt, and in order to help forward the good cause the Duchess has consented to receive purses of ten guineas or more from visitors to the opening ceremony. The object of the charity is so excellent, and its organization so satisfactory, that it is to be hoped that the public will respond generously to the present appeal.

A BRILLIANT and fashionable wedding was that of Col. the Hon. A. Stewart, Royal Horse Artillery, third son of the late Earl of Galloway, and Miss Adela Loder, younger daughter of Mr. Loder, M.P., at St. George's Hanover-square. The bride's dress was of white and silver brocade, combined with satin, elegantly draped with old Point d'Angleterre; her veil was of the same costly lace, fastened over a wreath of bridal flowers by diamond sprays; her page was habited in a Charles II. costume of black velvet with large lace collar. The ten bridesmaids were attired alike in white satin, almost covered with lace, the bodices being made of gold thread; the sashes and trimmings were striped dark blue velvet and gold, and the small gold bonnets were ornamented with red sigarettes, to match the artillery uniform, and gold acorns, the Stewart badge. Each wore a gold brooch in the form of a spray of oak leaves, with pearl and diamond acorns, the gift of the bridegroom. The newly-married pair have gone to Scotland to spend the honeymoon.

STATISTICS.

ABOUT 45,000 school-children in Germany have had their eyes examined, and one half of them were found to be short-sighted. In some schools the proportion of disaffected eyes was from 70 to 80 per cent. The evil is attributed to badly-lighted schoolrooms, poor desks, excess of study and too little exercise.

The production of beer in the United States last year amounted to 595,000,000 gallons, an average of more than 14 gallons for every inhabitant. This average is still behind that of Belgium, of Great Britain, and of Germany, the German average being 22 gallons per head annually; but it is larger than that of any other country, the increase in the consumption of malt liquors in the United States is in every way remarkable. In 1868 the total production was but 62,000,000 gallons, so that the increase has been more than eight fold in twenty years, the population having increased about sixty per cent. To counterbalance this, the statistics show that the production of distilled liquors has diminished during this period, notwithstanding the increase of population.

GEMS.

CANDID thoughts are always valuable.

A SIMPLE flower may be shelter for a troubled soul from the storms of life.

BETTER a soft heart and an iron hand, than an iron heart and a soft hand.

If you boast of a contempt for the world, avoid getting into debt. It is giving to gnats the fangs of vipers.

OLD age is the night of life, as night is the old age of the day. Still, night is full of magnificence, and for many, it is more brilliant than the day.

HEAVEN sends us ten thousand truths; but because our doors and windows are shut to them, they sit and sing awhile upon the roof and then fly away.

THERE is no harm, says Sir Walter Scott, but on the contrary, benefit, in presenting a child with ideas beyond his easy and immediate comprehension. The difficulties offered—if not too great or too frequent—stimulate curiosity and encourage exertion.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

BOOK RESTORING.—If a book be greasy, you separate the sheets and dip them in a solution of caustic potash, following up this by a bath of eau de javel, with a fourth part of clear water. A bath of sulphite of soda follows, and it only remains to hang the sheets up to dry on strings stretched across the room. When paper is "cottony" and rotten, a bath in water in which gelatine has been dissolved with a little alum may be recommended.

SAVOURY BOULETTES.—These are perhaps best made of beef; but they are excellent made of mutton, hare, game, or any kind of brown meat. To a pound of beefsteak allow a quarter of a pound of suet, chop them together finely, flavour with chopped parsley and lemon peel, a small piece of pounded mace, a tiny grate of ginger, a very little cayenne pepper, a teaspoonful of moist sugar, and a little salt. Mix these with four table-spoonfuls of fresh breadcrumbs and the yolk and white of an egg well beaten. Let these be well mixed together, and then formed into balls about the size of a Tangerine orange. Have ready made a good brown gravy, which must be boiling when the boulettes are put in; let them simmer gently for four hours over a slow fire, taking care that the lid of the stewpan be perfectly closed. Serve them piled up in the centre of a dish, with a border of dressed spinach, sorrel, endive, or mashed turnips.

MISCELLANEOUS.

The diminution of sickness in each generation depends largely upon the knowledge and practice of the preceding one as well as its own. While the work of hospitals and nurses cannot be too highly prized, we must look even more to the labours of competent and wise health-teachers for the future physical improvement of the race.

News of the Solar Eclipse of May 6 from the British observers on Caroline Island has at last come to hand. The observations were highly successful, as the sky was beautifully clear at the time, and some valuable photographs have been taken. During the middle of totality the light was equal to that of the full moon.

A GENTLEMAN in Manchester claims to have succeeded in applying orange peel to a very useful purpose. Orange peel dried in or on an oven until all the moisture has been expelled becomes readily inflammable, and serves admirably for lighting fires, or for resuscitating them when they have nearly gone out. Thoroughly dried orange peel will keep for a long time, and might be collected when the fruit is in season, and stored for winter use.

THE Black Flags or Annamites, who are giving France so much trouble, are said by a correspondent of *Le France* to include not only the natives and the Chinese, but a number of Europeans, who have rendered their military organization much more effective and dangerous. Their chief occupation consists in smuggling cargoes of opium, gunpowder and firearms into China, where accomplices—i.e., Chinese mandarins at Hué, and Europeans at Saigon—receive the spoil and warn the brigands of any danger. The ventures are generally so successful that three voyages up the Red River will bring the smuggler a clear £4,000.

THE South Kensington Museum has brought a splendid bronze Japanese incense-burner of modern work, standing 7 feet in height, for £1,580. In design the burner slightly resembles the famous classical group known as "Pliny's Doves" in the Capitoline Museum at Rome. It consists of a huge bowl, inlaid with golden spots and threads, on which perch pigeons in life-like attitudes, and rests on three rough legs on a gnarled trunk. Below are a peacock and hen, the former with a very long train. Besides this burner, the Museum has acquired three quaint Japanese groups of lacquered wood-work, chiefly representing saints and devils. In another department of Art the Museum has brought for £2,600 three valuable pieces of Flemish tapestry, dating from 1507, and representing the "Triumphs of Fame," and "Chastity," and of "Death."

POLITENESS IN SWEDEN.

A correspondent says:—A peasant of the lowest order never passes a fellow-peasant without a polite lifting of the hat. It matters not whether they meet in the highway or in the field; in the midst of all their hurry and toil this mark of deference one for the other is never forgotten.

I remember very well when Miss Tharaby was in Gothenburg last winter, as she stood at my window, which commands a view of the entire length of the principal street in the city, her musical laugh as she stood watching the crowds coming and going, and her calling me to "come and see this!" I stepped to the window, and asked her what she had seen which so excited her risibilities.

"Why," said she, "see those peasants in blouses walking in the middle of the street, taking off their hats to each other!"

"Yes," I answered; "that is nothing unusual; it is the custom of the country."

She could scarcely believe it more than an affectation, but when, shortly after, she found that the custom was fast rooted in genuine politeness, she protested her admiration of and warm liking for it.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

BRIAN BAIR.—The address would be quite sufficient.
F. D. W. S.—A receipt given on a Sunday is valid.
RHOMA.—July 3rd, 1871, fell upon a Monday.
FLOSSIE.—The 19th March, 1862, was a Wednesday.
H. H. D.—Apply to the inspector of factories of your district.
L. E.—The executrix can be compelled to act by any party beneficially interested.

ARTHUR G.—The indentures require a half-crown stamp.
S. R. D.—Schooners and brigs usually have two masts, barges and ships at least three, sometimes more.
H. W. T.—The "Pentateuch" consists of the five books of Moses—the first five in the Old Testament.
P. D. F.—The cactus is a native of the tropical regions of America.

TOM R.—In heathen mythology Mercury was the messenger of the gods, Hesiod their cupbearer.

F. R. S.—"Ellen means 'fruitful'; John 'beloved of the Lord,' 'grace' 'favour.'

F. R.—A nice-looking young gentleman; hair, bright auburn; fair-writing, but would improve with practice.
C. W. T. (Toulouse).—The LONDON READER will be sent post free for six months for 3d., or twelve months, 6s. 2d., to Toulouse.

SIMPLICITY.—Such marriages are not usually admirable, but your case, as the gentleman seems passionately attached to you, may be an exception. All depends on the strength of his affection for you.

ONE OF THE TRIBE OF BEMAHKOD.—One of the best preparations for strengthening the hair is—Eau de Cologne, 2 oz.; tincture of camphor, 2 drachms; oil of rosemary or lavender, of either, 10 drops. Apply once a day.

D. S. W.—All degrees of cousins may legally marry; the advisability of such unions from a social and physiological point of view, however, has been much debated.

HEAVERHOLDER.—Rains are due when made, and, though it is a hardship, you are certainly liable to pay them, as well as the cost of the summons.

P. F.—The innkeeper is liable for the value of the goods, as they were distinctly placed in the custody of one of his servants.

AMINA.—The expressions "strong as death" and "cruel as the grave," referring to love, occur in the "Song of Solomon."

DAMY.—Liquid ammonia applied with a piece of cloth and rubbed briskly over the surface will take grease and spots from cloth coats and waistcoats.

EILERS.—"Rosamond means 'rose of the world,' Mathilda is the same as Maude, and means 'a brave lady.' Agnes 'a lamb,' and Susan 'a lily.'

R. D. S.—A month's warning on either side must be given; but if the servant was grossly impudent, or refused to obey the lawful commands of her mistress, she is liable to instant dismissal.

M. B.—The origin of surnames is very varied; many were taken from personal qualifications either of mind or body, many from occupations, and others again from the place of birth or residence of the individual. There are one or two very good works on the subject.

AURORA.—Try what a little patience and coaxing will do. These means may be easily exercised without loss either of firmness or dignity. Some children are only hardened and rendered less obedient by physical punishment, and your boy may be one of them.

MILL MAY.—There is no copyright in music published originally in the United States. The song you name, however, is English, and you cannot reproduce it without the consent of the owner. 2. You may dramatize the story.

FINGAL.—St. Patrick, the apostle of Ireland, has been confidently stated to have been a Scot; he has with equal confidence been declared a Welshman. About the only certain thing we know of his origin is that he was not an Irishman.

DON PEDRO.—If you have the courage to persevere through two very formidable-looking books read Robertson's "Charles V." and Prescott's "Philip II." They will give you more insight into the period named than any others we are acquainted with.

DORETTA.—The crozier or pastoral staff of a bishop is an emblem of pastoral care and authority. Properly speaking, it should be a staff surmounted with a cross, though it is often confounded with another form of staff surmounted with a hook. William of Wykeham's crozier at New College, Oxford, is a fine example.

PET.—The origin of the game of dominoes is unknown. It was understood by the ancient Greeks, Hebrews, and Chinese. It was revived in Italy about a hundred and fifty years ago, and soon spread through Germany to France, and so to this country, where, however, it has not taken a very strong hold.

ANNA.—The legitimate descendant of Louis XVI. is Henri Chinq, who represents the house of Valois. The Orleans family represent the younger branch of the French Bourbons. It is improbable that monarchy of any kind will be restored in France at least during the present generation.

ALLIE.—To whiten the hands keep them covered as much as possible and use camphor in the water. There are chemical preparations which will have some effect in bleaching the skin, but they are not to be recommended.

ENDESSA.—You had better call at once upon the young lady's parents and tell them of your engagement, and get them to consent to your marriage with the daughter.

A. J. L.—The wedding-cake is always a conspicuous part of the entertainment. Boxes or sheets of white paper are usually provided, and slices of cake cut for the guests to take home.

P. N. R.—The next time the young gentleman tells you that he loves you, say that you cannot believe in who talks of love and says nothing about marriage. No young lady should entertain a gentleman who makes professions of love without offering himself.

DELTA.—If your claim to the land is a good one, you can enforce it by process of law. Our advice to you is to accept a reasonable compromise. Do not go to law except as a last resort. Your claim may be good, but yet you may lose your case.

STEPHEN.—You acted very properly. You should not call upon a lady until you have been invited by her to call. You have no reason to regret anything that you have done. The young gentleman has no reason to be angry and probably thinks very highly of you.

EMMIE.—Ladies recognize their gentlemen friends with a bow of graceful inclination; and it is their place to bow first to those with whom their acquaintance is but slight; while with very intimate friends the recognition is frequently simultaneous.

"PROVOKING."

Oh, what is so provoking,
So tantalising too,
As to be in desuetude
Of a neat and tidy shoe?
To see you daily going,
In sole, and heel, and toe,
With not a single farthing
To buy you more, you know?

Oh, what is so provoking,
I always get the blues
To see the new spring dresses,
Such lovely shapes and hues—
Yet know your poor old black one,
Is all that you can sport,
With its trimmings out of fashion,
And half a finger short?

Oh, what is so provoking,
When all along the street,
In every shop and window
You see such bonnets sweet—
Such exquisite dress-patterns,
On all the counters new,
When knowing they'd look better
If only worn by you?

Oh, what is so provoking
As an ugly turned-up nose,
Or hand and foot tremendous?
This everybody knows.
But, ah! 'tis worse and sadder,
To wish for raiment fair—
Yet poor as Job's old turkey,
With not a sou to spare!

F. M. P.

TESTER V.—If your husband has a hasty temper, you will need great wisdom and discretion to guide you aright and give you strength to rule your own spirit. If you can learn to possess complete command over your own temper you will be able to decrease the strength of your husband's temper.

BUXTON.—Our navy is the most powerful, although it has a smaller number of vessels than either the French or Russian navy. The respective number of vessels and men is as follows: English, 238 vessels, 38,800 men; French, 259 vessels, 48,283 men; Russian, 330 vessels, 51,194 men.

DEARLY BOUGHT.—The word "innundatio" must be spelt with two 'n's; it comes from the Latin *innuere*, to nod towards, i.e., give a hint to a person, and has gradually acquired its present meaning. Originally it is stated to have been used in a good sense, and to have formed the commencement of an old chancery writ.

WILLIAM B.—You are simply undergoing the experience which most boys and girls go through on arriving at their teens—of falling desperately in love with a pretty face. You will probably have other attacks of the same kind before you reach man's estate, but will survive them all, and be none the worse for the experience.

P. B. T.—"Falling stars," or meteors, have been observed for ages. The Chinese records of them go back to 641 B.C. The great meteoric display to which you refer occurred on the night of November 12th, 1853. It was seen in all parts of the United States, and was so brilliant and continuous that many people supposed that the end of the world had come, and that the air was already on fire.

F. W.—In the sentence, "The ground lifts like a sea," "sea" is in the objective case governed by the adjective like which is the only adjective in the English language that can govern a case. The number of the relative pronoun "who" in a sentence such as "Who commanded the allied forces at the battle of Waterloo?" can only be determined by knowing how many commanders there were; if one it is singular, if more than one plural.

ARDENT.—There are whole books, such as that by Please, devoted exclusively to the art of making perfumes; and besides these, a great deal may be found upon the subject scattered through the chemical and pharmaceutical journals and cyclopedias. You can get these books through any bookseller, and can learn much by studying them, but a thorough knowledge of the art of perfumery, or, indeed, any other art, can only be gained by years of practice.

D. C. S.—If you tell the young lady the exact truth, as you have told it to us, there will be no danger of you offending her. You can speak of your partiality for her for a long time before that occasion of the irresistible vision of loveliness which she presented under the flowering tree in the moonlight, and of your inability to restrain an expression of the love you then felt for her. A girl can stand a good deal of that kind of thing without taking offence.

ETIENNE RAY.—The word "agnosticism" is that doctrine which, in regard to theology, neither asserts nor denies, but professes ignorance. An "agnostic" is one who proclaims his ignorance of a future state. It is derived from the Greek, and is formed of the prefix *o* (equivalent to "not") and therefore gives a contrary meaning to the word to which it is added) and the word *gnosis*, which means "one who knows." The entire word, in its exact signification, conveys the sense that a person who claims to be an agnostic is "who does not know the future."

E. F. K.—I. Stains in marble caused by oil can be removed by applying common clay saturated with benzine. Apply it moderately, so as not to injure the polish. 2. Ink spots can be taken out of marble in the following manner: Take half an ounce of butter of antimony, and one ounce of oxalic acid, and dissolve them in one pint of rain water; add flour, and bring the composition to a proper consistence. Then lay it evenly on the stained part with a brush, and after it has remained for a few days, wash it off, and repeat the process if the stain is not quite removed.

CARNE.—1. To restore or polish furniture, use a mixture of three parts of linseed oil, and one part of spirits of turpentine. Put on with a woolen cloth, and when dry, rub with woolen. 2. We have it on good authority that an excellent stain for giving light-coloured wood the appearance of black walnut may be made and applied as follows: Take Brunswick black, thin it down with turpentine until it is about the right tone and colour, and then add about one-twentieth its bulk of varnish. This mixture, it is said, will dry hard and take varnish well.

LISA M.—According to the Roman poet "The quarrels of lovers are the renewal of love," and so we hope it will prove in your case. It is an old saying that there can be no true love without jealousy. This is more than doubtful, but still it is only natural that if your sweetheart is of a quick sensitive disposition he should take exception to your allowing the meaningless attentions of a brainless fool even though only "just for a bit of fun." Lovers who are really worthy of the name, even in this practical age, do not relish the object of their affections being dangled after by others, and are apt to exclaim, in the words of a well-known burlesque:

"Go, beauty, go, and get another lover where you can; Let him who may fancy the maid that fancies every man."

M. B. S.—One of the things which a man probably has in mind when he speaks about his honour compelling him to do this or that is, that if he does not do it he will suffer in the estimation of those whose good opinion he values. He may also have a very sensitive feeling as to what is due to himself, arising from a nice sense of what is right, just, and true. The poet Wordsworth, in defining honour, says:—

"Tis the finest sense
Of justice which the human mind can frame,
Intent each lurking frailty to disclaim
And guard the way of life from all offence
Suffered or done."

That is about as good a statement as can be given of what "a man of honour" probably has in mind when he declares that his honour compels him to a certain course of action.

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